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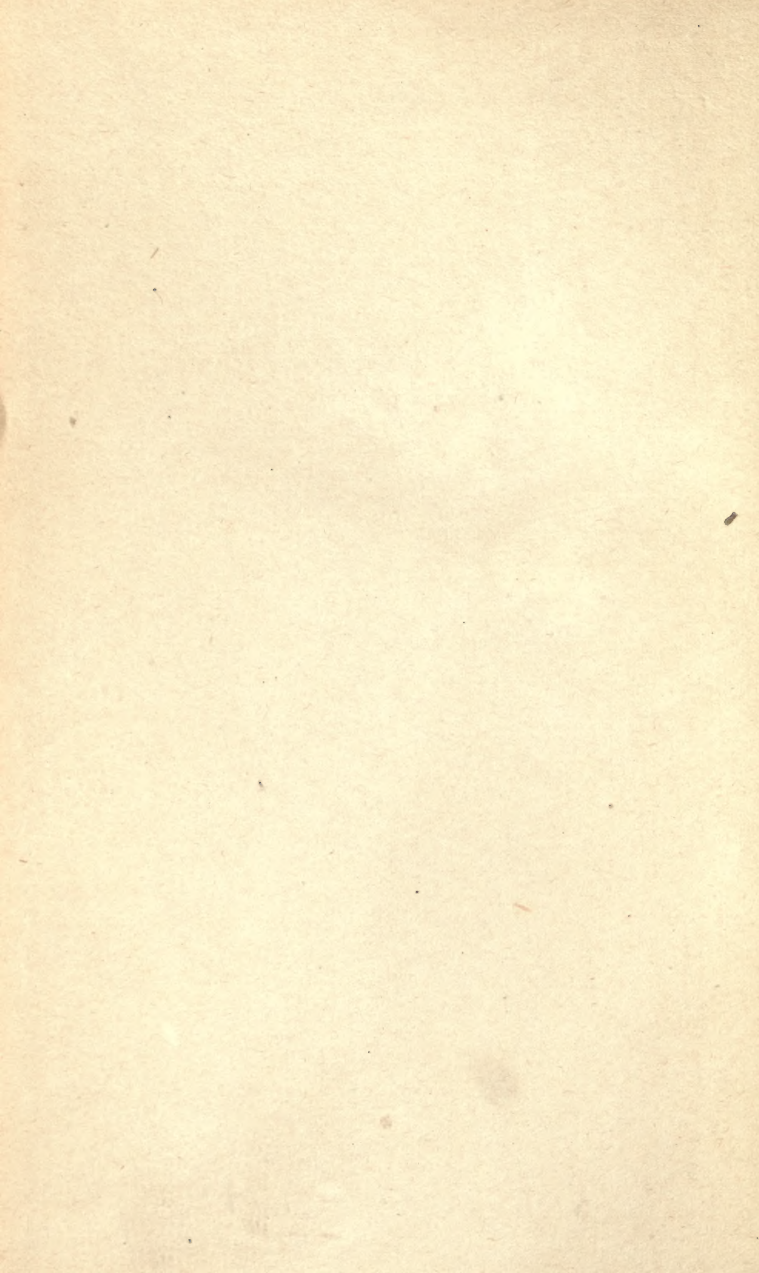
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DIVINE CONTEMPLATION FOR ALL

OR

*THE SIMPLE ART OF
COMMUNING WITH GOD*

By

DOM SAVINIEN LOUISMET, O.S.B.

Author of "The Mystical Knowledge of God," etc., etc.

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PREFACE

THE notion of Divine Contemplation is not less in need of being elucidated and brought back to its legitimate, traditional, Catholic meaning than was that of the Mystical Life. It has suffered just as much at the hands of modern writers, by a host of whom it has been misunderstood, distorted, narrowed down and all but made a bug-bear; whilst in its true self Divine Contemplation is the grandest, noblest, sweetest, easiest thing in the world; in some measure, and under some form or other, obligatory on all; and as necessary to the Christian at every stage of his spiritual life as is the act of breathing to the physical well-being of every animal, wherever situated in the scale of life, and at whatever stage of its development.

In this new treatise I take Divine Contemplation in its widest meaning, as understood by St. Thomas in his *Summa Theologica, Secunda Secundæ, quæst. 179-182*, and by St. Francis of Sales in his treatise on *The Love of God, Book vi, ch. vi, last paragraph*, where he says: "In order to attain to contemplation it is usually necessary to hear the divine word, hold spiritual conferences with others like the anchorites of old, read devout books, pray, meditate, sing devout canticles, and entertain good thoughts. Holy contemplation being the end and purpose of all these exercises, they are comprised under the same heading, and such persons as practise

these are called contemplatives, as also this sort of occupation is called the contemplative life."

This new treatise will, therefore, deal with Contemplation in all its varieties of form, and at the same time all the preliminaries to contemplation, all the acts which lead up to it or accompany it; in short, all the acts whether of the mind or of the will, whether of the spirit only, or of the body with the spirit, which have God directly for their object; rudimentary contemplation and perfect contemplation, and between these extremes, all the degrees—that is to say the entire gamut—of divine contemplation.

It needs no demonstration—because it has in itself the force of an axiom—that every adult Christian, whatever his age, profession, condition, or natural endowment, should in some degree be a genuine contemplative: that is to say, should, within the limits of his own capacities, natural and supernatural, be a sincere and convinced adept in Divine Contemplation. When we consider his state of grace, and all that state means: namely, his vital union with Christ; the presence in him of the Holy Ghost; the grace of manifold prayer (*spiritum gratiæ et precum*) (*Zach. xii, 10*); the spiritual dower of the infused virtues, moral and theological, and of the seven gifts; and his having at hand all the treasury of the Sacraments, the Sacred Liturgy, the Holy Scriptures, the lives of the Saints and their writings; to say nothing of numberless actual graces showered upon him all day long: in face of all this, we feel justified in holding that a Christian is inexcusable if he be not in some degree a contemplative.

Why then are there so very few contemplatives even among professed Christians?

It is only too true that for some it is a case of downright indifference and tepidity: Christians though they be, at least in name, they simply do not care. *Flens dico!* With the Apostle (Philippians iii, 18), *I say it weeping:* God is the least and last of their concerns. But there are also those who do care, who would indeed like to become contemplatives in the measure and in the manner willed for them by their loving God, and, perhaps, some have even made an attempt towards this.

Now what is it that has prevented the latter from succeeding in their attempt at Divine Contemplation?

This: they have met with no encouragement. Or it has been put before them in a wrong way. Perhaps they have been positively dissuaded from Divine Contemplation as from something dangerous. Or, finally, they have been bewildered or disgusted by the works they have read on the subject.

Now it is principally for such persons that I venture to publish this treatise. It may be a great presumption on my part, but it is true that I have no other ambition than to help souls of good will to lay hold of, or to return to, the Catholic traditional notion of Divine Contemplation, and to teach them how to use it to good purpose in their spiritual life.

This doctrine that all men are called to Divine Contemplation is no novelty. It has been the constant and insistent teaching of the Catholic Church for the past nineteen centuries;

and it is so to this hour, if only men would receive it as they should and carry it out in their lives.

The first questions and answers in the *Catechism* are: "Who made you? God made me. Why did God make you? God made me to know Him, love Him and serve Him in this world, and to be happy with Him for ever in the next." In these few words we have the whole philosophy of Christian life, its very essence, and also its proper division, all taught in a popular way by our Holy Mother the Church, to the little ones of the flock. We have here, in a nutshell, so to say, and shorn of technicalities, the whole concentrated doctrine of Christ about the mystical life. We are plainly told that this sort of life is lived between God and the individual soul; that it concerns the here and the hereafter; that so far as it concerns the present life our first business in it is "to know and love God"—that is to say, to have direct dealings with Him—and our next is "to serve Him" in acts of justice and charity to our fellow-men: the first thing being Divine Contemplation, the other being saintly action, as we have already explained at some length in a previous volume (*Cf. Mystical Life, ch. v*).

Now in this treatise, we are concerned with the first and principal part of the mystical life, namely Divine Contemplation or the knowledge of God united to the love of God. This is the sweet knowledge, the *Sapida Cognitio* of which the Saints speak in their works on the spiritual life. And they do but follow in the footsteps of Our Lord who proclaimed this truth: *Now*

this is eternal life, that they should know Thee (Father, who art) the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent (John xvii, 3).

This view, large and truly Catholic, of Divine Contemplation, at one stroke unceremoniously sweeps away, like a cobweb, the modern mistaken idea that Divine Contemplation is the exclusive privilege of an intellectual aristocracy ; as though the little ones of Christ did not count ; as though the dealings of God with them, and their dealings with God, were beneath notice and could be ignored ; or as though the dear and loving God were beyond the reach of these, the lowliest and humblest of the flock. Too long has this fatal mistake played havoc in the sphere of the spiritual life. It has restrained hundreds of thousands from loving intercourse with God. It has thwarted ever so many well-meant attempts towards union with Him. It is well, therefore, that the wide, generous, traditional doctrine of the Church on this momentous subject should be placed in the clearest possible light, and that this truth should be proclaimed with unflinching voice, even from the house-tops : **DIVINE CONTEMPLATION IS INDEED FOR THE MILLION.**

Therefore, in this new volume, I am going to try to be more and more simple, homely, direct, and unconventional. If, however, there should occur some passages difficult to understand, I would entreat my reader not to be discouraged nor to give up the attempt. These obscure passages should be read and re-read attentively, and if light does not dawn, they should simply be passed over. Later, when one has read the

whole book, especially when one has begun to practise it in real earnest, in all likelihood the difficulty will vanish altogether, and what at first appeared obscure will become clear and luminous and helpful.

It will be noted that the present volume bears a number (4). The reason of this is that buyers of my books begin to be uncertain as to the order in which they should be read. A person who wishes to follow out in them the logical sequence of thought, and the natural development of the subject, should read the volumes in their order of production :

1. *The Mystical Knowledge of God.*
2. *The Mystical Life.*
3. *Mysticism—True and False.*
4. *Divine Contemplation for All* (the present volume).

Other volumes will be produced (please God) in due course of time, and will each bear its proper number, until the series be completed. So will each of the first three as they may have to be reprinted ; as for those which are already in circulation, it will be an easy matter for their owners to number them according to the above indication. I would advise them to do so : for, although I have made it a point so to compose each volume that it may stand by itself and be read with pleasure and profit separately and for its own sake, as it treats of one special point of Mysticism, nevertheless the interdependence of the volumes and their cumulative cogency, arising from comparison and logical sequence, is evident and cannot fail to be more and more felt as we proceed.

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Divine Contemplation for All

CHAPTER I

AN ATTEMPT AT DEFINING DIVINE CONTEM- PLATION

AT the outset let us lay down this definition: Divine Contemplation is the act of communing with God. The word "communings" requires explanation. To commune is to share something with someone. It implies a twofold action, that of imparting something of one's own and that of receiving something else in return, or, vice versa, that of first receiving from another person and then imparting something in return. Thus, conversation is a sort of communing: in it one imparts one's own views and receives in return communication of another person's views. Any loving intercourse between two persons is a communing, for it is an exchange of marks of mutual affection. Thus mother and child, husband and wife, brother and brother, friend with friend, Jesus in the Holy Eucharist and the fervent communicant, God our Heavenly Father and the priest at Holy Mass.

Let us at once note that in loving intercourse, it is not so much the brain which is called into

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requisition, as the heart: we shall have more to say later upon this particular point. Now Divine Contemplation is just that kind of intercourse or communing. It requires two persons: the loving God and the loving soul; it is an exchange between them of marks of mutual affection.

Man, owing to his composite nature of spirit and flesh, is able to commune first with himself, his own *self*, and then with nature, that is to say with the world of creatures outside himself, both visible and invisible, particularly with his fellow-men; and finally, even with God, even with each one of the three persons of the Most Holy Trinity, and with the Sacred Humanity of Our Lord as it is enthroned in heaven or hidden in the Holy Eucharist.

It is because the soul of man is a spirit that man is able to commune with himself. Only a spirit is able to turn, so to say, upon itself and take stock of its own nature, and observe what passes within it, and institute with its very self a sort of conversation about it all. He raises questions and proffers answers, and achieves at times by this inquisitive process, when wisely conducted, startling discoveries, finding within himself depths hitherto unsuspected and well-nigh unfathomable, discerning wants and secret cravings which God alone can satisfy. We have a magnificent monument of that sort of inquiry in page after page of the *Confessions* of St. Augustine.

This sort of communing with self is called introversion. I have already alluded to it in my book on *The Mystical Life* (ch. i). Very use-

ful in itself and for its own sake, introversion is still more so as a preparation for and introduction to communing with God. How could communing with self fail to be useful and interesting? Next to God and Our Lord Jesus Christ, no other person or object ought to be dearer to a man than his own spirit which is within him.

This practice of introversion, when conducted in a prayerful spirit, will enable a man to discover in himself the trysting-place of the loving God. This is the very deepest and most secret part of a man's spiritual being, that wherein lies the divine resemblance, where the sacraments engrave their character, and the voice of conscience makes itself heard. It is the very heart and core of our personality. It is described in the writings of the mystics sometimes as the ground of the soul, sometimes as its apex, *la fine pointe de l'esprit*, says St. Francis of Sales. St. Thomas Aquinas calls it *Synderesis*, and St. Bonaventure *Scintilla*, or the luminous part of the soul, the *funklein* of the German mystics. God alone can enter into that *Sanctum Sanctorum*, or remotest sanctuary, of the human soul; God who made it—and the spirit of the man who is practising prayerful introversion. The whole world of other creatures is for ever barred out of it, and it is not even in the power of man to lay open this part of himself to anyone: *For, what man knoweth the things of a man, but the spirit of a man that is in him?* (1 Cor. ii, 11). It even seems that it will be so after our death and entrance into the spirit world, and throughout all eternity. This inviolability of each human soul, as well as of each angelic nature,

will be one of their deepest satisfactions. I gather this from such texts as, for instance, this one in the Apocalypse, ii, 17: *To him that overcometh . . . I will give a white stone and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth but he that receiveth it.* Does not this new name, which no one knows but he to whom it is given, show us God and the individual blessed spirit in the light of two lovers, who in their privacy give one another endearing names which they would consider it profanation to repeat in the hearing of others?

Communing with Nature, when done in the right spirit, is an indirect way of communing with God, since Nature but reflects in faint accents its Maker's omnipotence, infinite wisdom and loveliness. I shall say more on this later on.

Communing with our fellow-men is much more difficult to turn to good account. Conversation between them and me is a pouring out of spirit into spirit; a pouring out which may be of things good, or frivolous, or useless, or most horrible; which may help me in my union with God, or be an obstacle to it, making me incapable and unworthy of it; a pouring out and an imparting which may be met half way, eagerly sought for and seized upon, or which on the contrary should be protested against and vigorously resisted. Therefore, in every attempted communing of my brethren with me, the attitude of my spirit ought to be one of alertness and watchfulness, and of prompt decision as to what line of action I ought to take. The same is true in regard to the written word, whether of the living or of the dead.

This communing of men with one another is accomplished not only by the spoken or written word, but also, and at times much more effectually, by look and gesture, by general deportment, and by self-manifestation of the spirit or of the flesh. It is no trespass on the boundaries of justice or of charity to state, in a general way, that the communings of men among themselves are but too often far from good, because so easily tainted with the evil inclinations of corrupt nature. "Whenever I have been among men," says the author of *The Imitation of Christ*, "I have come back less a man." But this is not as God would have it to be. The right order is that our communings with one another, as well as our communings with Nature or with self, should be but an indirect way of communing with God. *If any man speak* (let him speak) *as the words of God* (1 Pet. iv, 11).

The highest privilege of man is that he should be able, even in his present condition during his pilgrim days on earth, to commune with the loving God, if only he care to: thereby showing himself as far above animality as heaven is above the earth. By communing with God, the darkest life can be illumined; that of the slave, of the convict, of the prisoner of war, of the bedridden sufferer, of the victim of injustice and persecution or even of his own past misdeeds—indeed, the victim of any kind of misfortune. The life of every Christian, whatever his lot, his calling, the pressure of his occupations, ought to be illumined and glorified at least twice a day, morning and night, by communing with God; and if it may be so, much oftener, by the

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constant use of ejaculatory prayers. As for the life of the priest, or of the religious of either sex, it ought to be very holy and very happy, being one of constant communing with God. At almost every hour of the day, and for some even during the night, they are called upon to cease their communings with self or creatures and to converse with God instead, if only they will enter into the spirit of it and not be satisfied with a mere mechanical performance of their duty of public prayer—to say nothing of the facility they have all day long for private communings with God, in the secret of their heart.

Let this, therefore, stand at the outset as our definition: Divine Contemplation is the act of communing with God, wherever performed, howsoever performed, be the act brief and passing, or long sustained and frequently recurring.

O my brother, you who read this poor attempt of mine at setting before you the right notion of Divine Contemplation, do you really want to understand? Then, leave off reading; put the book aside, and at once begin to practise communing with God. Set out anyhow and anywhere. The loving God is just waiting for you to speak to Him, or—may it not be?—for you to hearken to Him. You cannot possibly miss Him. You may have sometimes wished to commune with an earthly friend of yours and not have found him, or perhaps you were stopped at the door with the cold and significant word: *Not at home!* You may have set out in pursuit of him, and have had the mortification of seeing him try in every way to dodge you, because, perchance, your conversation bores him,

AN ATTEMPT AT DEFINING IT 7

or he is afraid you come to ask him for a loan, or some other favour which he is not ready to grant. Now no such affront is to be feared from the loving God. He is always at home to us. He is never so pleased as when we want to have speech with Him and press Him for favours. *My delights, says Divine Wisdom, are to be with the children of men* (Prov. viii, 31).

CHAPTER II

A FIRST DIVISION OF DIVINE CONTEMPLATION

NOW that we are in possession of a working general definition of Divine Contemplation, we may proceed to give our first division of the same. I promise myself a great advantage therefrom, a decided increase of light on the whole subject.

The first division then is this: (1) Divine Contemplation as it is in God Himself, who is the fountain head of it all; and (2) as it is derived from Him and communicated to His reasonable creatures.

A critic reviewing my book on *The Mystical Life* took exception to my speaking of Divine Contemplation "as it is in God." Well, and is it not in God? Divine Contemplation is the very life of God.

Divine Contemplation is the secret of God's infinite bliss in Himself. It is the very act by which God the Father eternally begets His Divine Son, and the further act, to put it in our own poor human language, by which, in an ecstasy of mutual love, God the Father and God the Son eternally breathe out their Holy Spirit.

This twofold but simultaneous act of Divine Contemplation as we conceive it to take place in God—an act in which God is at the same time the object contemplated and the subject

contemplating, the object loved and the subject loving—this act is necessarily blissful, and infinitely so, as its object is the absolute good and is apprehended fully. Therefore, Divine Contemplation is—if we dare use the expression—the primary, essential feast of God, the rich banquet spread before His Divine Majesty, the never-failing source of the torrent of His delights.

Evidently, God could have reserved this rich banquet of Divine Contemplation for Himself alone. No creature can be conceived with any inherent right to, or any natural aptitude for, seeing and enjoying God as he is in Himself—in other words, the Beatific Vision. Now, out of His own infinite goodness, God has willed gratuitously to share His eternal bliss with some created natures. For this purpose He made the universe, a world of things visible and invisible, and in it He placed the Angels first, and then man, raising both of them to the supernatural state. After having created them to His own image and likeness, He made them come by grace into a share of His divine nature, preparatory to assuming them into the realm of His glory, there eternally to see Him face to face, and share His divine operations and His bliss.

God, who is the eternal and blissful object of His own contemplation, unveils the same object to the enraptured gaze of the elect in paradise. These happy children of God are seated at the very banquet of their heavenly Father; they are fed, so to say, with the same viands as Himself; they are inebriated by the same torrent of de-

lights. Says the Psalmist: *They shall be inebriated with the plenty of thy house ; and thou shalt make them drink of the torrent of thy pleasure.* (Psalm xxxv, 9). And there is no danger, indeed there is no possibility of their ever losing such happiness, nor any danger of their ever growing weary of it, for it is infinite and inexhaustible, ever new and ever imparting to them new strength to bear the intensity of its delights.

Are we, who live on earth, completely debarred from a share in this divine banquet? Not so. By an inestimable favour, we are at least admitted to gather, if we will, and to eat, the crumbs which fall, so to say, from the table of God and of the Blessed in heaven. We, too, are called upon to practise Divine Contemplation after a manner suited to our present condition of wayfarers, who are yet far from home, and who walk by faith in a state of trial under sin. We are admitted already to share in some measure in the knowledge of God as He is in Himself and to partake of the divine blissful love. All we have to do is to consent to apply our minds to the loveliest of all objects, God as He is revealed to us by faith, and to open our hearts to the sacred effusions of His love.

All men, without exception, are invited to this feast of God, as all men are called unto salvation. The banquet-hall is the Catholic Church. All are urged to come into it ; not only the rich and well-to-do—I mean the intellectual, the men of high gifts and culture and refinement—but the poor as well, the halt, the maimed, the blind, the mendicant—that is to

say, the uneducated, the illiterate, the simple-minded, the little children, the ignorant, and sinners, too, if only they will abandon sin. *Wisdom hath built herself a house, she hath hewn her out seven pillars. She hath slain her victims, mingled her wine and set forth her table. She hath sent her maids to invite to the tower and to the walls of the city: Whosoever is a little one let him come to me. And to the unwise she says: Come, eat my bread and drink the wine which I have mingled for you* (Prov. ix, 1-5). *Compelle intrare: Compel them to come in, that my house may be filled*, says the divine host, Our Lord Himself, in the Gospel (Luke xiv, 23). A sweet violence is offered to everyone to sit at table, and to eat and drink his fill of the good things of God spread before him; that is to say, everyone is pressed to give himself to the exercise of contemplation, lovingly to attend to the mysteries of God and Our Lord Jesus Christ. "The grace of contemplation," says St. Gregory the Great, "is not one which is given to the highest and not to the lowest, but oftentimes both those who are the greatest and those who are the least receive it; oftener those who live in retirement, sometimes even those who are married. There is no rank or state of the faithful from which the grace of contemplation is excluded" (*In Ezech. L. ii, Hom. 5, number 19*).

Two conditions only are required of the guests: first, that they put on and keep on the wedding garment, which is the state of grace; and then, that they bring in with them, to the banquet, a good appetite, that is to say that they

be of right good will to *taste and see that the Lord is sweet*. No one is to sit there in the nakedness and confusion of mortal sin ; and no one, even wearing the wedding garment of grace, ought to sit there idly, looking bored by the company, disgusted at the bill of fare, and wishing for something different. *He hath filled the hungry with good things and the rich he hath sent empty away* (Luke i, 53). In the banquet of religion, God imparts a certain knowledge of Himself and experience of His sweetness to simple souls, who relish such nourishment. As for the pompous fool who disdains the humble process of prayer, and who looks upon himself as the rich man among his brethren (because, forsooth, he may happen to possess some trumpery erudition, some superficial knowledge of Scripture, or philosophy, or history, or the natural sciences), God sends him away empty ; that is to say, God does not make Himself known to him in the secret of his heart by an ineffable communication of divine sweetness. And yet, he is such a fool that he does not perceive that in the midst of plenty he is starving !

If our first parents, and with them the whole human race, had retained the state of primitive innocence, contemplating God and delighting in the act would come as a second nature to us. We should easily discern God's most lovable perfections reflected everywhere on the face of the material universe, and in our own composition of body and soul, and in the society of perfect men and good Angels, and in the deposit of revelation and the whole order of religion such as it would be in this case. It would then

have come as easy and natural to man to think of God and live in His presence—though not yet seeing Him face to face—and to love Him, and to delight in His contemplation, as it is pleasing and natural to us to crave for the food and drink needful to our body, and to take them with relish.

Divine Contemplation is the engrossing occupation of the Holy Souls in Purgatory ; a most sublime contemplation, but extremely painful. Indeed, it is the keenest and most searching of their torments. They are out of this our region of shadows and in the land of perfect light of the pure spirits ; they are, by this very fact, in possession of a marvellous infused knowledge of the universe, and of its laws, and of the laws of their own being, and of God as the Maker of all ; they are fully aware of the jarring of some of their own past acts with these laws of God, a jarring which makes them debtors to the Divine Justice ; moreover, they have had a glimpse of the infinite loveliness of God as reflected upon the countenance of Christ, whilst He was in the act of judging them immediately after their death ; finally, they are no longer occupied with such saintly activities as they had on earth, and which might afford them some distraction and relief : for all these reasons, the Holy Souls cannot turn away their minds from the thought and contemplation of our Lord and of the Divine Essence ; nor, indeed, do they wish to. They are pierced through and through with the burning arrow of the love of God. They are pining away with the most ardent desire to see face to face the object of their love and to be with Him

for ever. They are experiencing a holy hunger and thirst for the banquet of God, of which, perhaps, they made too light whilst they were on earth. They realize at last, as here below no one can, how sweet the Lord is ; and now they experience how terrible a thing it is to have been made for the enjoyment of so sweet an object, and, through their own fault, to be deprived of it for a time.

To be definitely, irrevocably, deprived of God, and thereby to suffer untold torments, is of course the very essence of damnation. The crime of the reprobate is precisely that he would not have Divine Contemplation whilst on earth, and thus, and then, he made himself unfit for Divine Contemplation and the bliss that goes with it in heaven. So God had perforce to cast him away for ever into the exterior darkness.

Not that the very devils in hell, together with all the reprobate, do not practise some sort of contemplation. They do: but oh! what a terrible contemplation!—that of their own black heart, that of the accumulated guilt and misery of all their companions. They would not have the contemplation of the loving God, they would not taste how sweet He is ; as inevitable consequence they must now taste the horrible bitterness of all else without Him. *Know thou and see how evil and bitter a thing it is for thee to have left the Lord thy God* (Jer. ii, 19). And this bitterness they will experience throughout all eternity. The spirit of man, like the nature of the angel, is a mirror that reflects faithfully the things with which it lives.

CHAPTER III

ON NATURAL CONTEMPLATION

CONTEMPLATION as it is given to man to practise on earth, in his present condition of trial, and of trial under sin, must be divided into two species: (1) That which is purely natural, and (2) supernatural, or Christian, contemplation.

Purely natural contemplation is that in which no light of faith, no ray of the Divine Revelation intervenes. The Christian or supernatural species is that in which, whatever be its object—God or anything inferior to God—one never considers it apart from the data of the Divine Revelation, deposited in the hands of the true Church of Christ, the Catholic Church.

The act of contemplation in itself is natural to man and is an integral part of his rational life. Every human being practises it, even the babe in arms after it is a few months old. See what eyes full of wonderment he opens upon the world. There is an element of contemplation at the bottom of every rational enjoyment. By the very fact that man is *animal rationabile*—"an animal endowed with the reasoning faculty," his life is an entanglement of action and contemplation: action corresponding chiefly to the animal element in his composition, and contemplation chiefly to his rational element. Every man, at some time of every day, provided

only he enjoys the use of his faculties of sense and intellect, indulges in some sort of contemplation.

This serves at once to show how vain is the excuse put forward by the tepid Christian, that he has no aptitude for contemplation. The aptitude indeed exists within him and is frequently employed by him; only he does not care to apply it to the object which is supremely worthy of its exercise—namely, the Divine Goodness—because, forsooth, he would have to change his own negligent way of living, and this he has quite made up his mind not to do.

St. Thomas (*Secunda Secundæ, quæstio* 180, *a* 4, *ad* 3), after Richard of St. Victor, distinguishes six kinds or degrees of contemplation:

The first is attention to material objects.

The second is attention to the order and disposition of these.

The third is when from the consideration of things visible man is led to conceive the idea of things invisible.

The fourth is when the mind turns to the contemplation of things invisible, without the help of images.

The fifth is when, in the light of Divine Revelation, the mind of man rises to the knowledge of truths which are above the capacity of pure reason.

The sixth is when in the same light of Divine Revelation a man comes to the knowledge of truths which not only are above the capacity of human reason, but even seem to go counter to it, such as, for instance, the mystery of the Blessed Trinity.

In this illuminating page of mediæval Theology we run the whole gamut of human contemplation, from its lowest degree to its most sublime. We shall do well not to dismiss it lightly. Observe that in the first four degrees man is shown to be naturally equipped for the work of contemplation, as though this were to be (as indeed it is) his life's great work in time as well as in eternity.

These first four degrees place before our eyes a penetrating analysis of the workings of man's mind within the limits of its natural capacity. They constitute the purely natural process which must necessarily precede any perception of the supernatural, even as the foundation must be laid down before the house can be reared. It is worthy of remark also that these four degrees of human contemplation, as they succeed one another, coincide with the successive stages in a man's life thus :

The first degree of contemplation, or the perception of sensible objects, is the sole contemplation of infants. The beasts, likewise, have this perception of sensible objects: but with them it is not a first degree of contemplation, as there is to be no second degree. Their experience goes no further, and is turned wholly to the purposes of animal life. Hence it will appear that when man does the same—when he turns wholly to the purposes of animal life his perceptions of the world of creatures—without passing further on, he makes himself like unto the unreasoning brute. "God," says the pagan philosopher Epictetus, "has introduced man as a spectator of Himself and His works,

and not only as a spectator but as an interpreter of them. It is, therefore, shameful that man should begin and end where irrational creatures do. He is rather to begin there but to end where nature itself has fixed our end, that is, in contemplation and understanding and in a scheme of life conformable to our nature" (*Moral Discourses*, vi—On Providence).

The second degree of contemplation indicated by St. Thomas is the passing from sensitive perceptions to intelligible ones: it is also that of the child growing into the age of discretion and assuming moral responsibility. The third degree is peculiarly that of the adolescent; and the fourth characterizes the workings of the mind of the youth verging on manhood. The other two degrees belong only to the Christian as such, that is to say, to man when, through Baptism, and the other sacraments, he has come to his full growth in Christ Jesus.

The field of natural contemplation extends all the way from the atom, or infinitesimally small particle of matter, even to God as the Primal Cause, through all the various and intricate grades of inanimate matter and of life; but it does not extend beyond the boundaries of Nature, nor does it call for the use of any other tools than the faculties of sense and intellect within their natural compass. For the pagan, ancient or modern, the most Holy Trinity, Jesus the Son of God, His mystic bride the Church of the elect, the grace of the sacraments, the promises of eternal life in glory; all these are as though they were not, just as to a blind beast the light of the sun and the splendid pageant of

nature are as though they were not. The natural man simply ignores these mysteries, as he ignores also the fact of original sin, the finality of the present life and its high purpose, reaching out beyond the grave, and the fearful consequences attending his failure to achieve moral goodness. Such is the case also with the modernist, even though he use words filched from the Christian vocabulary, as he has been careful first to deprive them of their original, substantial, dogmatic and historical meaning.

It is impossible now to discern to what extent the pagan philosophers of old have been unconsciously affected in their natural contemplation by, on the one hand, stray remnants of the primitive revelation, and on the other by infiltrations of either Jewish or Christian thought. Nor are we prepared to deny that the Holy Ghost intervened with His prevenient grace in some of their meditations. Heraclitus, Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Epictetus, Plotinus, and, outside this classical circle, the barbarian philosophers Confucius, Gautama and others, have said some very wise things ; only there seems to have occurred a process of petrification at some point in the natural contemplation which should have led them on to God.

For the whole gist and purpose of natural contemplation, from its start to its finish, is to lead man to the knowledge of God, and consequently to His love, and to the will to give Him pleasure by obeying His laws and praising His perfections. Arrived at this point, a man, even though as yet deprived of the light of the supernatural revelation, is open to the influence

of divine grace which is pressing all around him, and if he will but let it have entrance into his heart, he is thereby transformed into a child of God. May it not be that we ought thus to interpret the declaration of Pope Pius IX that "if a man be by the force of circumstances kept in invincible ignorance of the true religion, God will not condemn him:" (Cf. Denzinger's *Enchiridion*, editio 11, 1647). It would seem as if the pagan, at the precise moment when he fulfils the whole natural law—that is to say, follows it out to its practical consequences in the worship of God and in the amendment of his life—has his natural contemplation changed into supernatural, and the grace of God infused into him, and he is made through the implied Baptism of desire, into that new creature, a Christian, all unknown to himself and to the world.

It is for not having thus followed out natural lights to their ultimate consequences that those philosophers of antiquity alluded to by St. Paul, were so severely condemned: *For the invisible things of him, from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, his eternal power also and divinity, so that they are inexcusable, because that when they knew God, they have not glorified Him as God or given thanks, but became vain in their thoughts, and their foolish heart was darkened* (Rom. i, 20-21).

CHAPTER IV

CHRISTIAN CONTEMPLATION

THE field of Christian Contemplation is incomparably vaster than that of natural contemplation. It is none other than the most Holy Trinity as at present made known to us by Divine Revelation—the official external revelation of which the Catholic Church is the guardian—and the internal experimental revelation of Mystical Theology: that is to say, the three Divine Persons with all their ineffable operations within and without (*ad intra et ad extra*) are the primary objects of Christian contemplation: and within these three Divine Persons, and together with them, the Sacred Humanity of Our Blessed Lord Jesus Christ; and ourselves and all things else in Jesus: for, *All things are yours*, says St. Paul . . . *and you are Christ's and Christ is God's* (I Cor. iii, 22 and 23).

This immense field opened before the contemplative Christian is admirably outlined and, so to say, mapped out by the Church in the Nicene Creed, which is but a resetting of the Apostles' Creed in more explicit terms. Therein one is taught to view first oneself, and then all things else—whether visible or invisible, terrestrial or heavenly, present or future, ephemeral or eternal—in reference to God, and in the light of the most Holy Trinity. All things are meant

to lead a Christian to the knowledge and the love of God not only as the Primal Cause, as He is knowable through the splendours of creation, but also as He is in Himself, that is to say, as a Trinity of Persons in the absolutely transcendent unity and simplicity of the divine essence.

That which the blessed in glory contemplate face to face, and enjoy for ever, in an ineffable ecstasy of love—the very same, we on earth, if we will, do contemplate in the dim light of faith and begin to enjoy in the secret of our hearts.

However, the greatest difference between Christian and purely natural contemplation arises, not from the vastness of its field and the peculiar light under which it is seen, but, above all, from the fact of its being an act of our mystical life, that is to say, of the joint-life with God which every Christian is expected to live in the secret of his heart.

Natural contemplation is mainly a brain process and is all one-sided, being the exclusive act of the contemplator. All the vitality of the act springs from himself. Christian contemplation on the contrary is, as far as man is concerned, mainly a heart process; and, moreover, it is not his own exclusive act. Before and over, and accompanying, the act or acts of the contemplator, there is the vital action of God upon him, to prevent him, to excite him, to draw him, to seize upon him and to bind and knit him to God. All which is expressed with much felicity in innumerable passages of the sacred liturgy, particularly in the well known prayer: *Actiones nostras, quæsumus, Domine,*

aspirando præveni—"Prevent, we beseech Thee, O Lord, our actions by Thy holy inspirations, and carry them on by Thy gracious assistance, that every prayer and work of ours may always originate from Thee and through Thee be happily ended."

If every act of the fervent Christian is not a purely human act, but an act of his joint-life with God, and thereby is sure to have a divine element in it, how much more so the act of prayer, the act of Divine Contemplation?

There is, then, in Christian contemplation a new element which is not found in the philosophical or scientific or æsthetical contemplation. The catechism calls it the grace of God. Let us put it plainly: this new element is the presence of God, the intervention of God, the direct action of God, the share of God in the life of the mystic. In Christian contemplation man does not do all, is not left to his own puny resources, nor does he view God at a distance or in the abstract; he actually meets the living God; he meets Him in a vital embrace, giving to Him and receiving from Him, or rather receiving first and then giving. Not only is there a supernatural revelation of God proposed to the mystic, by our holy Mother the Church, and a dogmatic utterance apprehended by him, and the supernatural faculty of faith granted him in order that he may grasp the divine truth and give assent to it; but God Himself comes to meet him, to embrace him, and to pour out the Divine sweetness into his heart. All this, of course, takes place under the seal of faith.

The joy that is felt in Christian contemplation is not only *gaudium de veritate*, the joy of truth in the abstract—such joy as may be tasted by any man who makes a right use of his natural powers—but it is also something of a much higher order, for it is the direct doing of God: the act of God lifting the Christian and folding him to His fatherly heart; it is the touch of His hand, the beating of His heart, God's *hiding of the mystic in the secret of His face* (Psalm xxx, 21), God having secret speech with His servant without any sound of voice.

This new element of the presence and active intervention of God is found in Christian contemplation in all its degrees, even in the very lowest and humblest ones, though, of course, it is more manifest in the highest, rendering them all absolutely supernatural. Christian contemplation in all its degrees, in all its forms, is the meeting of God and man in a loving embrace. It takes two to meet and embrace: here they are, the loving God and the loving soul. Whenever a man is ready, and willing, and sets about the act of meeting his heavenly Father, God is also ready for him; nay, it is God Himself who has been secretly rousing this man, and exciting him and moving him, and sweetly drawing him on, and knitting him to His own divine self.

The whole process of Christian contemplation makes for a closer, more active, more intimate union with God through a gradual simplification of the soul. Here are some of the stages:

1. Discursive orison;
2. Affective orison;

3. Orison of simplicity ;
4. Orison of quiet ;
5. The experience of Mystical Theology ;
6. Semi-passive orison ;
7. Passive orison ;
8. Ecstatic orison ;
9. Miraculous orison ;

All of which we shall describe in their proper place.

Now, at each of these successive stages the action of God grows greater, while that of man seems to dwindle because it grows more and more spiritual : and his enjoyment of God grows in proportion, though it becomes more and more secret, more remote from the observation of men, and is jealously guarded from their prying curiosity. *Secretum meum mihi* (Isaiah xxiv, 16) : "I keep my own secret," says the mystic : even as the Blessed Virgin Mary kept the secret of the Incarnation locked in her breast until it pleased God to reveal it to St. Joseph.

It is hardly necessary to remark that this new element in Christian contemplation is overlooked by non-Catholic writers on Mysticism. As they never had any experience of the active and preponderant part played by the loving God in the Christian's joint life with Him it is not surprising that they should ignore it completely. What is a legitimate subject of wonder and disgust is to find it overlooked by Catholic writers. There are some who treat of Divine Contemplation as though it were purely man's doing and nothing more. They have introduced into modern piety a sort of contemplation dry and barren, absolutely disconcerting, and more likely

to defeat its own professed purpose of uniting one with God, than to bring it about. They seem to say to the loving God who is ready and eager to play His part and act with them: "Nay, nay, Lord: please let me do it by myself. Do not interfere. I am going to spin it all out of my own brain. I only require that You will give me a sitting. Just let me have a good look at Your Divine Majesty. I am the artist, Yours the likeness I want to throw on the canvas of my faculties."

Is this impertinent enough?

And whilst man is fondly imagining that he is contemplating God, he is much more contemplating his own fatuous self, admiring and congratulating himself for being so clever. Of course, he is quickly brought to a dead stop. God will not sit for him. God will not accept contemplation on those terms. God eludes his grasp, his gaze. Then there comes discouragement; the rash and ill-advised Christian gives up the attempt, and will have nothing to do henceforth with Divine Contemplation. The very name of it will rouse his resentment, as though he had been treated unkindly by Our Lord.

Who is to blame here? Surely not the loving God. What is amiss is the method, the "brain process," and those who teach such a method, whoever they may happen to be, and those who follow it! Instead of seeing in Christian Contemplation what there is in it, namely a lively, hearty communing with God, they have made of it an intellectual communing with self. Little wonder that it is found unsatisfactory in the end.

CHRISTIAN CONTEMPLATION 27

Let us never grow tired of repeating that Christian Contemplation is an act of our joint life with God, an act of our family life with God. By the merits of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and through the efficacy of the sacraments, we have become members of this family. Now, every well-bred child embraces his beloved parents at least twice a day, morning and evening, giving and receiving those delicate tokens of affection which mark him as one of the family and one very dear indeed. The true child of God, the fervent Christian, will do the same with regard to his heavenly Father.

Let us here sketch out the ideal day of a Christian in the world, in regard to Divine Contemplation.

It begins with the fervent morning-offering and prayer, and possibly a quarter of an hour's meditation, and perhaps even holy Mass and Communion.

How cheerfully and bravely does a man face the day's drudgery after such a beginning!

The Angelus at noon and Graces before and after meat give him occasions to look up again to the Father in heaven, and lovingly to speak to Him, to talk with Him, to kiss His bountiful hand. Perhaps he will be able to wedge in, at this point, a flying visit to the Blessed Sacrament, or a decade of the Rosary and a quarter of an hour's spiritual reading.

Perhaps, again, between the evening Angelus and night prayers he will manage to read to himself or to the whole assembled family, a chapter of the beautiful lives of the Saints, from such books as the *Miniature Lives of the*

Saints of Father Bowden, or the *Fioretti* of St. Francis of Assisi, or the *Golden Legend* of James of Voragine, or Abbé Grimes' *L'esprit des Saints* (a wonderful collection, a library in itself, seven vols.). The lives of Saints issued in penny pamphlets by the Catholic Truth Societies of England and of Ireland are also most excellent reading.

And all through the day, all through his various occupations, manual or mental, he will know how to breathe in the perfume of the loved presence of God, how to hearken to the secret inspirations of His grace, and how to season all he does with the constant offering of ejaculatory prayers. .

Now it should not be difficult to realize such a programme: it is ideally simple, and I have, in divers countries, seen it carried out by Christians living under healthy and sane conditions of life. But, alas! we are obliged to own that the tendency of society is more and more to render impossible even so moderate a demand and such a rational disposition of the day. For one thing, there is no more privacy. Almost everyone now, almost from childhood upwards, is thrown amongst a huge crowd of fellow-students, fellow-workmen, fellow-soldiers or sailors, and can hardly call his soul his own. Then the conditions of work have become so inhumane: men are caught and whirled about at top-speed in a vortex of mechanical drudgery, until they are giddy and incapable of mental freedom, or rational enjoyment, or prayer. Even after work, under such conditions, there is a dangerous depression.

CHRISTIAN CONTEMPLATION 29

Next to that of the priest and the religious, especially those of contemplative orders, the mode of life the best suited for Christian contemplation is that of the husbandman. Here again one might exclaim with Virgil, though with a higher meaning: *O fortunatos nimium sua si bona nôrint agricolas*: "Too blissful would the husbandmen be if they only knew how to appreciate their happy lot." Next to theirs come those quite manual professions which can be pursued at home and leave the mind free to be with God a good deal, if only one will turn lovingly to Him.

Can a person be truly called a Christian, in whose daily life, God, and the thought of His presence, and loving converse with Him, hardly find a place?

CHAPTER V

SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF CHRISTIAN CON- TEMPLATION

THE end of the Mystical Life, as we have seen at some length in the treatise which bears this title, is to unite us closely to God, to render us deiform, to communicate to us the very life of God, making us sharers in His sanctity and His happiness. The two functions of the mystical life, namely, Divine Contemplation and Saintly Action, contribute each in its own way to bring about these marvellous effects, to make the mystic, and to show him to the world, as truly deiform; but the function which does this more directly and effectually is, for obvious reasons, Divine Contemplation. It deals directly with God, comes into immediate touch with Him, actually feeds upon Him. If you handle gold powder, your hands will shine like gold. If you saturate your hair and your clothes with perfume, you will carry about with you its pleasing odour. The little child at his mother's breast who knows no other food, exhales the wholesome odour of milk. The man who keeps company with well-bred, refined, gentlefolk only, will naturally make their good manners his own. So likewise, if you associate constantly with God, if you live with Him and feed on Him, and handle Him, and saturate your whole being with His divine grace and

presence and love, you will become God-like, deiform.

How shall we know that this is being, or has already been, effected? Are there characteristic proofs, authentic marks by which we may discern how the case stands with us? Yes, there are such marks.

In genuine Christian Contemplation the following characteristics are always found :

1. Compunction.
2. Humility.
3. Admiration.
4. Joy.

Sometimes all of them stand out distinctly like the primary colours in the rainbow ; sometimes one of them is more conspicuous ; at other times they are all blended together, like the primary colours in a ray of white light : but they are always there and always absolutely supernatural. Wherever these four marks are found together, you have authentic testimony that there is indeed genuine Christian Contemplation, that the Holy Spirit has a hand in it, that the loving God is in it, that He is half and more than half of it. Whenever you can prove the absence of any one of these four characteristics, depend upon it, the other three are absent as well, whatever appearances may be. You may have the contemplation of a Christian, perhaps even of a theologian, but you have not Christian contemplation, you have not an exercise of the first function of mystical life ; you have but a sham : *æsonans, cymbalum tinniens* : "sounding brass, a tinkling cymbal" (1 Cor. xiii, 1), nothing more.

The first two qualities, Compunction and Humility, ought in fact to precede contemplation ; they are preparatory dispositions. When contemplation supervenes, they go along with it, and are deepened by it and made an abiding possession of the soul. The other two, Admiration and Joy, are after-effects of contemplation ; they grow out of it, and hang on it as most beautiful and sweet fruits upon their native tree : fruits which become the more plentiful and luscious, the more one cultivates Divine Contemplation.

There is this also about these four properties of genuine Christian Contemplation, that the mystic can at all times almost infallibly bring about for himself the contemplative mood, simply by making the acts of these four virtues. Dear reader, if you are sceptical, just try and see.

Compunction, first. This is only saying that we have to begin at the very beginning. As the Pseudo-Areopagite observes, "purification" is the first act of the hierarchy and the first stage of the spiritual life. No well-bred child will present himself to be kissed by his parents with a dirty face. The first care of a man who wants to be admitted to the presence of a king and have speech with him, or even sit at his table, will be to have a thorough cleansing and to put on clothes befitting the occasion. The first gift of the Holy Ghost in order of execution and usefulness is "Fear of the Lord" (Isaiah xi, 3).

Compunction bruises and breaks and melts away the stony hardness of our sinful hearts. This process must be gone through before we can hope to feel the touch of divine love and

become plastic under its hand. It is clear that compunction is not a brain process: it is mainly of the heart and will, in so far as man is concerned in its production, and then there comes into it the united action of Our Lord and His Holy Spirit. To the tears of true and abiding sorrow of the fervent soul are added the efficacy of the Blood of Jesus Christ and the flames of the love of God kindled by the Holy Ghost present in the heart of the Christian.

The author of the *Following of Christ* says: "I had liefer feel compunction, than know its definition." One of the reasons why a great many Christians fail in the business of the mystical life, and signally in the work of Divine Contemplation, is that they overlook the necessity of compunction. (See what I have said in *Mysticism—True and False*, ch. xiii, about the necessity of an abiding sorrow for our past sins to guard us against relapsing into them.) For it seems that the more one is a sinner the less he realizes his state, or is sensible of its consequences. On the other hand, the more the Saints make progress in the love of God and the spirit of prayer, the greater become their sorrow for past sins, and their self-contempt and self-hatred and self-persecution by way of expiation and of salutary discipline. One morning the holy Curé d'Ars was found all bathed in tears. "What has happened?" asked his companion. Nothing in particular had happened, he answered. "I am only bewailing the sins of my poor life." "Je pleurs mes pauvres péchés."

As we are bent upon this noble enterprise of the mystical life, let us begin at the very begin-

ning of every attempt at divine contemplation: sorrow for sin. Let us lay ourselves open and responsive to the powerful solicitations of divine grace, and break our hearts over the misery of having offended so good and loving a Father. Let us in true sorrow strike our breast, chide ourselves, and exclaim: "Oh! how could you do such thing? How could you stay so long without repentance? How could you have so little compassion on your merciful Saviour? How could you despise the terrible judgments of God?"—and then turn to the loving Lord and tell Him of our repentance.

The *Confessions* of St. Augustine exhibit a fine illustration of this spirit of compunction which ought to be at the basis of all our attempts to have speech with the Divine Majesty. Now, suppose we try this. Suppose we make it our practice to stir up our sorrow for past sins every time we desire to pray. Let us try, and then see how we get on with our contemplation.

Look at the order of the liturgy of the Mass. Before the priest is permitted to go up to the altar, he and the people present are made humbly and publicly to confess their sinfulness and to crave the intercession of all the Saints in view of the pardon of God. Sometimes the Psalm *Judica me*, and the joyful *Gloria in excelsis* and the solemn profession of the orthodox Faith, the Nicene Creed, are omitted; but the *Confiteor* of the Priest, and then that of the people, never.

CHAPTER VI

HUMILITY OF THE CONTEMPLATIVE

IN the wake of Compunction, issuing from it and begotten of it, comes Humility. But it soon overtakes and long outstrips its father. Thus we reach the most fundamental disposition of the soul for the work of Divine Contemplation.

No one is so humble as the genuine mystic, and no wonder: he lives in the presence of God! Let us try and realize what this means. Does it not stand to reason that the fervent Christian who habitually keeps the gaze of his soul fixed upon the Divine Majesty, and then looks at his own puny self in the overwhelming splendour of the light of the Three Divine Persons, cannot help having an amazing feeling of his own native void and indigence? He soon gets out of sight, sinking himself into depths of self-abjection which only Saints dare fathom, as did St. John of the Cross with the plummet of his "NOTHING."

Those who fear that entering upon the ways of contemplation and mystical life may lead one to become puffed up, show that they know nothing about it. The exercise of the presence of God is much more conducive to solid humility than even the consideration of one's own past sins and wicked life. One cannot really contemplate God and be proud or vain. The more

a man perceives the loveliness of God, and tastes how sweet He is, and allows himself to be united to Him, so much the more is he inclined, nay compelled, to think little of himself.

We must insist on this fundamental humility, which is practised by every mystic independently of all consideration of personal sinfulness. For, indeed, if in order to be humble it were required to have sinned, then Our Lord could not have said: "Learn of Me, because I am humble of heart." And His immaculate sinless Virgin-Mother could not be, as she is in very deed, the humblest of all pure creatures while at the same time she is the most exalted. Nor could the Blessed Angels be humble, in whom not the lightest shadow of sin has ever been found—and yet we know that they are: the Liturgy of the Church, with the Prophets of both Testaments, represents them to us in the attitude of deepest self-annihilation before the Divine Majesty.

In the act of contemplation the fervent Christian holds himself annihilated before God, and with the whole Church, Militant, Suffering and Triumphant, proclaims that He is alone worthy to receive blessing and praise and honour and glory. This utter self-abasement before the Most Holy Trinity is the true exercise of love which Martyrs have practised in the midst of their torments, and holy Confessors in the midst of all sorts of temptations and contradictions, and which made them capable of enduring or accomplishing so much.

This fundamental humility of the Christian

contemplative does not prevent his freely acknowledging, and if need be, recounting and even proclaiming the great things God does in him. Only he takes no credit to himself, but gives all praise to God alone. "He hath done to me great things: holy is his name" exclaims the Blessed Virgin Mary at the moment when she is greeted as the true mother of God. And thus also did St. Teresa, on the order of her confessors, in spite of her own repugnance, give to the whole world the secret of her life of union with God. In our own days, one of her sweetest, most lovable daughters, Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus, popularly known as "The Little Flower," committed to writing, with the most charming simplicity, the story of her beautiful soul.

Now it is my contention that this second characteristic of genuine Christian Contemplation is never found anywhere else; and also that whenever it is absent from the contemplation even of the Christian man, his contemplation ceases to be Christian: it is spoiled, it is corrupted, it will do no good, even were it the most brilliant piece of theological study.

Such is in particular the misfortune of the wilful heretic. Dionysius the Areopagite says: "If the human intellect, dissatisfied with its allotted portion of the Divine blessing, endeavours to trespass over the limits which God has set; if it applies itself rashly to the contemplation of splendours which are above its comprehension; no doubt the light will not cease to shine, but the soul will neither obtain what was never meant for her, nor even will she, on

account of her insane pride, be allowed to preserve what had been freely given her. This is the penalty of her meddling indiscreetly in things above her capacity."

Then he adds: "This notwithstanding, the blessed light keeps perpetually shining upon all: ever present before the minds of men, ever ready to communicate itself with a divine liberality, so that they are free to receive it" (*Eccles. Hierarch. Ch. ii, p. 3, no. 3*).

In Ruysbroeck's *Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage*, there is a beautiful page on the "Humility of the mystic," and the blessings that go with it. He says:

"Now understand this. When the sun sends its beams and its radiance into a deep valley between two high mountains, and, standing in the zenith, can yet shine upon the bottom and ground of the valley, then three things happen: the valley becomes full of light by reflection from the mountains, and it receives more heat and becomes more fruitful than the plain and level country. And so likewise when a good man takes his stand upon his own littleness, in the most lowly part of himself: and confesses and knows that he has nothing, and can do nothing of himself, neither stand still nor go on, and when he sees how often he fails in virtues and good works: then he confesses his poverty and his helplessness, then he makes a valley of humility. And when he is thus humble and needy and knows his own need, he lays his distress, and complains of it, before the bounty and the mercy of God. And so he marks the sublimity of God and his own lowliness; and

thus he becomes a deep valley. And Christ is a Sun of righteousness and also of mercy, who stands in the highest part of the firmament, that is on the right hand of the Father, and from thence He shines into the bottom of the humble heart ; for Christ is always moved by helplessness, whenever a man complains of it and lays it before Him with humility. Then there arise two mountains, that is two desires ; one to serve God and praise Him with reverence, the other to attain noble virtues. Those two mountains are higher than the heavens, for those longings touch God without intermediary, and crave His ungrudging generosity. Then that generosity cannot withhold itself, it must flow forth, for then the soul is made ready to receive and to hold more gifts. Then, this valley, the humble heart, becomes more radiant and enlightened by grace, more ardent in charity, more fruitful in perfect virtues and in good works" (*Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage*. Ch. vi. Translated by Dom. C. A. Wynshenk).

The fundamental humility of the contemplative soul seems to me also wonderfully brought out in the *Showings* of Mother Juliana of Norwich. In Chapter iii she relates: "He showed a little thing, the quantity of a hazel nut, lying in the palm of my hand, as meseemed, and, as it were, round as a ball. I looked thereon with the eye of my understanding, and thought: 'What may this be?' And it was answered generally thus: 'It is all that is made.' I marvelled how it could last, for methought it might suddenly have fallen to nought for littleness. . . ."

In Chapter viii she thus comments on this: "Well I wot that heaven and earth and all that is made is great, large, fair and good. But the cause why it showeth so little to my sight, is that I saw it in the presence of Him that is the Maker, for to a soul that seeth the Maker of all things, all that is made seemeth full little."

I wonder whether the holy recluse who describes herself as "a simple creature, that could no letter," was aware that in this last sentence she was repeating word for word what one of the mightiest geniuses and most illustrious mystics of the world, St. Gregory the Great, says in his *Dialogues* (Book II, ch. xlv). There, after having described how St. Benedict in one of his visions saw the world under the form of a tiny sphere, lost in a ray of the glory of God, he drops this casual remark: "For indeed, to the man who sees the Creator, all things created appear very small." *Videnti Creatorem angusta est omnis creatura.*

To conclude this chapter: there is no fear, then, that the true contemplative shall ever wax vain-glorious. And thus, whenever you see a man boastful, self-assertive, noisy in his speech, depend upon it, that man is not addicted to the practice of Divine Contemplation. An empty wain rattles as it goes along the road; one laden mountain-high with the golden sheaves goes along slowly, silently, majestically. A shallow river makes a loud noise as it rakes the stony bottom; the deep, full river, ominously silent, slides by with irresistible power. And so humility—deep, sincere, solid—is an unmistak-

able characteristic of genuine Christian contemplation: the deeper that it says not a word, that it makes no demonstration.

CHAPTER VII

ADMIRATION AND JOY

COMPUNCTION and humility together produce their first effect by setting the Christian free from all inordinate love of self or of creatures ; and, further, they cleanse the soul, rendering it exceedingly bright ; and, still further, they cause it really to receive, and really to reflect, the rays of divine light as they shine full upon it—nay, upon all men, and upon all the world.

So the divine goodness floods the contemplative soul with its splendour and benignant heat ; there is immediate contact between the loving God and the loving soul ; God allowing Himself, in a manner, to be seen and touched, to be handled and tasted by the spirit of this fervent Christian, in whom there then arises a feeling of admiration, that usually breaks forth into praise and melts away into an overwhelming sense of joy.

Compunction and humility are, indeed, peculiar characteristics of Christian contemplation ; seldom if ever are they found anywhere else : although one might be inclined to think that these two new feelings, admiration and joy, are also found in purely natural contemplation. It is true that some kind of admiration and joy is the reward of natural contemplation ; but these feelings are of a different description altogether.

The Christian's admiration in the act of Divine Contemplation is a joint product of the exercise of his natural reason, theological Faith and the gift of Understanding ; while his joy is a joint product of the exercise of his natural affectionateness, the theological virtue of Charity, and the gift of Wisdom. These two feelings then, in their origin, in their motive, in their mode of operation, and in their results, are essentially supernatural.

A man casts his eyes upon the loveliness of nature in its majestic totality or in some of its wondrous details, and he is seized with admiration : if he be a mystic, his admiration will at once rise above what evoked it, and it will ascend straight up to God the Father as the benign creator of all these marvels, to God the Son as their divine exemplar, to God the Holy Ghost as the sustaining principle of them all. *By the word of the Lord the heavens were established and all the power of them by the spirit of his mouth* (Psalm xxxii, 6). Then he casts the eyes of his soul upon the mysteries of Our Blessed Lord as they are presented to us by the Church in the Gospel-revelation, and he discovers in them (as we shall see at some length in a subsequent volume), a new world full of incomparably greater wonders : and his admiration grows by leaps and bounds. Finally, from the Sacred Humanity of his Saviour, our fervent Christian is led on to the contemplation of the divine personality of the Word, and of the Father who eternally begets Him, and of the Spirit of Love who proceeds from both Father and Son as from one principle, and to the con-

templation of their infinite perfections, and there his admiration is unbounded and unutterable.

Some modern writers, of the infidel school of thought, accuse Christianity of having a tendency to render men insensible to the charms of nature. How unjust this indictment is, the lives of our Saints, and almost all the monuments of Catholic art and literature, demonstrate. What has sometimes happened is that the contemplative has, on particular occasions, been so overwhelmed by the spiritual beauty he beheld with the inward eye, that there was left in him no power to enjoy the loveliness of natural scenery. Thus, St. Bernard could travel a whole day on the shores of one of the most beautiful lakes in the world, and not look at it, because he was then rapt in the greater loveliness seen by his spirit united to God in ecstatic prayer. This only shows that there are divers grades of beauty which solicit man's admiration, and that in our present condition our reserve power of actual perception and enjoyment is strictly limited. And so it will happen that, if it be mightily drawn upon by one particular object, none of it can be spared for another. The fountain-head of St. Bernard's rapturous admiration lay deeper than the surface of things: consequently, it was of a finer quality, and incomparably more refreshing and potent than any purely natural feeling; and sprang up even unto eternal life, to the very throne of the Blessed Trinity.

From this admiration of the contemplative flows spontaneously the praise of God: the loving and rapturous praise of Our Father in heaven. This is abundantly illustrated in the

whole range of the sacred writings from Genesis to the Apocalypse, in the sacred liturgy, and in so many burning lyrical effusions of the Saints ; for instance, to name but one : in the canticle of St. Francis of Assisi to " My brother the Sun." It is also borne out by the daily experiences of fervent souls who live in close union with God and are careful to banish from their heart all that displeases Him. Praise, rapturous, burning praise of the Beloved, not always set in words or sounded in the ear—for when admiration is intense, one is struck speechless ; the feeling expresses itself only in the ecstatic attitude of soul and body. And is not this the loudest praise : "*Tibi silentium laus!*" *Silence is thy fitting praise* (Ps. lxiv, 2, in the Hebrew version). Does not the recollected, serene, winsome countenance of the Saints proclaim to the world that *the Divine Wisdom's conversation hath no sadness, nor her company any tediousness but joy* (Wisd. vii, 16)—joy unspeakable?

In his contemplation, our mystic emulates the admiration shown by the simple-hearted shepherds of Bethlehem at the angelic message, and at what they found in the grotto of the Nativity ; the admiration of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of St. Joseph at the things they heard said of the Divine Child ; the admiration of the angelic hosts at witnessing the Lord of glory become an infant of a day, when they made the country-side of Judea resound with their songs of praise. This also enables him to picture to himself the admiration of the same angelic hosts at the mystery of the Holy Mass

and of the real presence of Our Lord in the tabernacle. Oh! how the contemplative sees at times, "in his mind's eye," these Blessed Spirits pressing around him after holy communion, adoring their Lord just new born in the poor stable of his own heart, and praising Him there! And if we, too, are dimly conscious of the glory that is visiting and investing us at such a moment, how we should break forth into songs of gladness and praise at the loving condescension of Our Lord!

We have spoken of joy. May we not use a stronger word—more expressive, at any rate—and say "exultation"? So it is styled hundreds of times in the Scriptures. The song of praise of the Blessed God on the lips of the mystic, or in the inmost sanctuary of his heart, is not only a sign of admiration but of exultation as well.

And now, mark. The praise seems to go forth from man to God; in reality it comes from God, passes through the heart and lips of man, and, then, from man, returns to God. The exultation that goes along with it is an overflow from the heart of the loving God, flooding the heart of the pure and fervent Christian. It is the very bliss of God making itself felt in man. It is the Holy Ghost, the substantial gladness of God the Father and of God the Son, manifesting His presence in the soul and body of the wayfarer who is yet so far from home; and filling him already with delight and heavenly consolation.

People of little faith cannot understand this. Seeing the servants of God experience, as they themselves do, so many of the sorrows and

hardships of the present life, they find it difficult to reconcile visible facts with assertions concerning the great joy of the spiritual life.

The explanation is simple.

There takes place in the fervent Christian something like the wonderful phenomenon of the bliss of the beatific vision in Our Lord's soul, at the same time as He was plunged in the horrors of His agony in the garden and of all His sacred Passion. It is of faith that Jesus enjoyed the beatific vision in the highest part of His soul, without cessation for a single moment ; and it is of faith, also, that He truly suffered all the bitterness of the torments described in the Gospels, and much more, that may be read between the lines of the sober narrative.

Now, in much the same way—if we may liken small things to great, and the servant to his Divine Master—in much the same way, the mystic experiences at once joy and pain. The common sorrows and trials of the present life are not spared him. He has his full share of them ; nay, at times, much more than the rest of men : still—deep down in his inmost heart there is the joy of the presence of God, the exultation of the conscious possession of the Holy Ghost.

It is precisely the task of divine contemplation to render the Christian aware of this well-spring of heavenly consolation which he carries about with him ; to bring it to the surface ; to make it flow freely and water all the garden of his soul, in the measure of the actual dispensation of divine grace.

The devil tries hard to make the Christian who is in trouble from outward circumstances abandon the practice of prayer, and, especially, commit mortal sin. He knows that then, indeed, the poor man will be in sore distress, for he will no longer have the resource of going down into the secret place of his heart, there to seek and to find the consolation of God—and the God of consolation. A mortal sin is like a corpse, thrown by a murderer into that deep well, the conscience of man, poisoning its sweet waters with abomination.

On the other hand, the tepid Christian, through grace—so long as he preserves it—possesses, indeed, in the depths of his soul this well-spring of the presence of the Holy Ghost and of His consolation: but he keeps the mouth of the well obstructed. A heavy stone lies there, which he never takes the trouble of lifting up or rolling aside, so as to draw and drink of the refreshing waters. May not this, perchance, be our case?

CHAPTER VIII

THAT GOD IS ALL FOR MAN'S ENJOYMENT

ARE you surprised, dear reader—or possibly even scandalized—at the heading of this chapter? ‘Yet we have already, at least a score of times, met with this great truth that God is all for man’s enjoyment, not in these precise terms, it is true, but in equivalent ones. Our obtuseness of mind, when it is a question of the things of God, is such that the same principle has to be set before our eyes repeatedly, and under several different aspects, before we are able to take it in and give it not only a notional, but a real assent, thus making it a part of our mental equipment and our possession for ever.

Not without some confusion do I remember my own amazement when for the first time, in one of Ruysbroeck’s works, I came upon the statement that God, indeed, is alone for man’s enjoyment, whilst creatures are only for his use. At first it struck me as a novel doctrine, and truly extravagant. Then, on further consideration, it dawned upon me that, at any rate, it was a most consoling doctrine and entrancingly beautiful. I began to wish it were true. It took me some time to realize that, in making this statement, the great Flemish mystic of the fourteenth century was but the echo of still greater mystics: St. Thomas Aquinas, Peter

Lombard, St. Augustine, the Pseudo-Areopagite, St. Gregory the Great, nay, St. Paul, and St. John, and Our Lord Himself.

Let us concentrate our attention upon this astounding proposition: God is all for man's enjoyment. Let us consider it; let us weigh it; let us take it in—or at least, as much of it as we are able, and with our whole mind and heart. We shall not grasp or fathom its full meaning: it is so deep, so wide, so sublime a truth, and we are such shallow vessels; yet even so, what we do grasp of it should serve to bring about a happy change in our outlook upon life.

God is all for man's enjoyment: creatures are only for his use! God the Father, the abysmal fountain of the Godhead; God the Son, the eternal, infinite, resplendent Word; God the Holy Ghost, the substantial love of the Father and of the Son; the Sacred Humanity of Our Lord: all, ALL, for man's enjoyment; whilst created things, animate or inanimate, spiritual or temporal, are but so many means of leading up to God and helping him to take his delight in Him alone, above all things. Says St. Augustine: "This world is for our use, not for our enjoyment. The things that are for our enjoyment are The Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost." (*De Doctrina Christiana.*)

Enjoyment is actual possession with pleasure. To enjoy a thing is to take delight in it for its own sake. To be real and full, enjoyment must give satisfaction to the whole man of us, and principally to our spiritual part, to our reason, to our will. Now God alone can do

that. This is peremptorily proved every day by the experience of all men, good or bad: the good finding, indeed, perfect delight in God alone; the bad trying to find perfect delight and repose in things created, and failing conspicuously in the attempt.

To judge from the way in which most people order their lives, and carry on their activities, it would seem as though creatures only were for our enjoyment. As for God, He may be feared, or worshipped at a respectful distance, or placated by prayer and sacrifice; but where is the worldling who would ever think of seeking his delight in Him? A good meal, fresh air; the beauty of a landscape, some masterpiece of the arts, the sweets of human love and friendship; elegance of face and figure, and other personal accomplishments; health, honour, success, fortune, luxurious surroundings; in a word, all the good things of this world—these, according to the world's gospel, are the things to be sought after and to be enjoyed. But to consider God as a proper object of enjoyment—who has ever heard of such a proposition!

Even to some professedly pious people, the idea that God is for man's enjoyment may appear simply preposterous. Nevertheless, it remains true that God, and He alone, and the whole of Him—if I may so speak—is for man's enjoyment; and not only at some future date, when we shall have gained heaven and shall see Him face to face, but even now, here on earth, during our days of pilgrimage, in our present condition of trial, and of trial under sin, here whilst we are still walking by faith.

If only we get hold of this great truth, what wonderful light it will throw for us on the whole subject of the Mystical Life, and more particularly on the right notion of Divine Contemplation.

Do you ask : How is it possible to enjoy God now ? I would rejoin : Rather, how is it possible *not* to enjoy Him, Who, though unseen, is ever with us, the Supreme Good ? We might thus counter with cross-questions to little purpose. But let us look at the facts. Is it not a fact that on the one hand there are those who, on their own showing, do really enjoy God and the things of God : prayer, the sacraments, Mass, holy reading and the exercise of all virtues ; whilst, on the other hand, there are those who do not, who shun and loathe the very thought of God and of heavenly things ?

More pertinent questions are : How do these contrive to fail to appreciate such a supreme good as is God, and how do those manage to find their delights in Him ? Both of them manage the matter in a most obvious and direct and simple manner. They allow love to do it all. It is a question of the will, of the free choice of man, of his affection. Let me try and illustrate this by some examples from Holy Writ.

In the book of Exodus, we have the contrast between the people of Israel and their saintly leader, Moses. On the one hand the people cry out to Moses : *Speak thou to us and we will hear ; let not the Lord speak to us, lest we die.* (Ex. xx, 19.) And this same people is ready at any moment to forget the Lord and all the

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wonders He has wrought in their behalf, and to turn to the worship of the golden calf! On the other hand we see the Lord speaking to Moses familiarly, *face to face, as a man is wont to speak to his friend* (Ex. xxxiii, 11), and Moses growing very bold, indeed, to the point of daring to ask: *Lord, show me Thy Glory!* God answers: I will indeed show myself to thee: *I will show thee all good; but, in a manner appropriate to thy present condition. Thou canst not see my face, for man shall not see me and live; but behold, there is a place with me, and thou shalt stand upon the rock, and when my glory shall pass I will set thee in a hole of the rock, and protect thee with my right hand till I pass, and I will take away my hand and thou shalt see my back parts; but my face thou canst not see.* (Ex. xxxiii, 18-23.)

The Christian contemplative is like Moses: He knows he cannot as yet see God face to face, that being the exclusive privilege of the blessed in heaven; nevertheless he keeps asking of the beloved God: *Show me Thy glory*—that is to say, “Grant me a passing glimpse of Thy infinite perfections; give me a taste of Thy ineffable sweetness. Even without my being able as yet to see Thee, give me, oh! give me, to embrace Thee, and feel Thy arms around me!” The mystic dares thus to press his Lord. The dear God has pity on him. He answers: “O little man, puny creature of a day, in thy present infirmity, indeed *thou canst not see me and live.* But *there is a place with me* where thou canst have a firm footing as upon the solid rock—the sacred Humanity of my beloved Son;

from thence thou canst have a glimpse of my infinite majesty and yet not be consumed. *I shall set thee in a hole* of this rock—in the deep wound of the side of thy crucified Saviour ; there thou shalt be secure from all danger of spiritual pride and consequent blindness : then shall I pass before thee in the Dark Cloud, and then thou shalt see me, thus, and not otherwise.”

So it comes to pass that the mystic, like another Moses, really enjoys the company of God, has speech with his beloved Lord, hears Him speaking to himself as a man to his friend ; whilst the immense crowd of negligent, half-hearted, lukewarm Christians cry in abject terror : “ No ! no ! let not God speak to us, lest we miss enjoying the other things ; this would indeed be as death to us.” They never give a thought to all the marvels God has wrought expressly to make them His own chosen people, nor to all the benefits He has so lavishly bestowed upon each one of them, personally, in order to win their love, and make them cling to Him, and seek their delight in Him. Instead they are ready to turn to the insane worship of any idol !

The Gospel narrative offers us another contrast : the peoples of two cities who came out to meet Jesus, but on very different errands : the Gerasenes and the Samaritans of the town of Sichar.

The Gerasenes came to ask Our Lord to leave their country, because they had lost their herds of swine in consequence of His casting devils out of a madman possessed by a legion of them. Between having Our Lord in their

midst or keeping their swine, they did not hesitate: they chose to do without Jesus.

On the other hand we see Our Blessed Lord, at Jacob's well, entering into friendly conversation with a woman of the labouring class, a poor sinful creature. She had had five husbands, and the man with whom she was then living was not her husband—perhaps, even, he was that of another woman. To such an one, because she was not unwilling to listen, Our Lord reveals and explains the deepest truths of salvation and the very secrets of the mystical life. And when in an outburst of irrepressible enthusiasm, the poor sinful woman has become the herald of the Messiah to her own people—men and women of her own condition, no doubt, working people, rough and ready in speech and manners, and with a liberal sprinkling of open sinners among them—Jesus allows His sweet Self to be, so to say, captured by them and led, with a well-meaning, gentle violence, into their city. And He remained three days in their midst; and they were all subdued and captivated by His meekness and loving compassion and by His divine teaching, the fruits of which appeared soon after the Descent of the Holy Ghost upon the Apostles, Peter and John being sent into Samaria to receive the first disciples from among them. (Acts viii.) Verily the *Fields were white for the harvest*” (John iv, 35). But how these simple-hearted people must have been delighted at meeting Our Lord! And how surprised they would have been, had they been told that they were actually practising divine contemplation. For, so indeed it was.

See then, in the inhabitants of these two cities an apt image of the contemplative and of the non-contemplative. These last will not have speech with Our Lord, except just to let Him know, in so many words, that they do not want His company. Oh! they are polite about it. *Ce sont des gens comme il faut!* but they have quite made up their mind to do without Him. The reason? Simply because if Jesus stayed with them, their herds of swine—their filthy lusts—would have to go. On the other hand there are those in all conditions of life, especially in the humblest, who, touched by the grace of God, crowd affectionately around the Blessed Saviour, ready to break with a sinful past, and to forgo worldly advantages, in order to enjoy His sweet presence.

Truly, whether we enjoy God, whether we seek and find our delight in God, or whether we centre our life in things created, is purely a question of self-determination with or against the grace of God; it is a question of the will, of the free choice of man—a question of love.

As I have devoted a small treatise wholly to this subject of the enjoyment of God by the fervent Christian—my first published work, *On the Mystical Knowledge of God*—I may perhaps be permitted to refer to it anyone who may desire to go a little deeper into this subject.

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Section

Number

CHAPTER IX

DIVISION OF CHRISTIAN CONTEMPLATION DIGNITY OF BODILY WORSHIP

NOW that we have elucidated in the preceding chapter—as far as we were able—the right notion of Christian Contemplation, we may proceed to its proper division.

The first and obvious division of Christian Contemplation, taken in its broadest acceptance, is into (1) Bodily Worship, and (2) Mental Prayer.

Bodily Worship is a dealing with God, or a kind of prayer, in which certain set attitudes, or even motions of the body, and the use of the organs of speech by vocal allocution or recitation or song, hold a large place—not, however, without due application of the mind.

Mental Prayer is that in which, ordinarily, the body being at rest or in gentle motion, or the hands being busy with some easy mechanical work, the mind alone seems to be concerned in the enterprise of divine contemplation and praise, thus coming nearer, in its dealings with God, to the ways of pure spirits. In the present chapter we are concerned with Bodily Worship only.

It is not one of the least mistakes of writers on the subject of prayer, during the last three centuries, that they conspicuously fail to appreciate bodily worship at its full value, or to

understand the mind of the Church about it. They seem not to have even so much as suspected the efficacy of bodily worship as a means of closely uniting us to God, a means which at times opens the way to the sublimest flights of pure mental prayer. Even the venerable Father Baker, otherwise so admirable in his *Holy Wisdom*, seems not to have sufficiently seized this truth. Thanks mostly to the labours of the illustrious Dom Guéranger, a serious movement of reaction in the right direction has now set in. It is my most ardent wish to promote it according to the grace that may be imparted to me.

Bodily worship holds a considerable place in the corporate life of the Church as well as in the spiritual life of each one of its members individually. It is a mode of prayer divinely ordered, befitting the complex nature of man. It is the prayer of the whole of him, and not of a part only. Being compounded of flesh and spirit, man is bound in strict justice to approach God with his whole being, and to worship the Divine Majesty at once with his body of flesh and with his spiritual soul. Nay, he is compelled thereto by the very laws of his nature, since he can perform no single act of the mind without some participation of his bodily organs.

I submit the following considerations as calculated to help us to realize how grand and noble a thing bodily worship is in itself, and how profitable to us it is intended to be.

The first act of Our Lord as God made man, at the very moment of his Incarnation, was, according to the testimony of the Psalmist (Ps.

xxxix, 7-9) and of St. Paul (Heb. x, 5-10), a most solemn act of bodily worship. For, "*when he cometh into the world he saith: Sacrifice and oblation thou wouldst not, but a body thou hast fitted to me; holocausts for sin did not please thee: then said I: Behold I come. In the head of the book it is written of me that I should do thy will, O God.*" Upon which St. Paul comments in this wise: "*In saying before, Sacrifices and oblations and holocausts for sin thou wouldst not, neither are they pleasing to thee, which are according to the law. Then said I Behold I come to do thy will, O God: he taketh away the first that he may establish that which followeth. In the which will we are sanctified by the oblation of the body of Jesus Christ, once.*" An act of bodily worship—as we see by the last words—so wide and so mighty in its scope that it takes in all who are ever to be members of His Church and His Mystical Body; an oblation which, though made once for all, we can take it for granted Our Lord renewed thousands of times during his life on earth.

To say nothing of the rest of his life, the whole sacred Passion of Our Lord from beginning to end, from his agony in the garden to his last cry on the rack of the Cross, is a bodily prayer

Holy Mass, on the part of Our Lord, is a bodily prayer: for it is the oblation, even as on the Cross, of His Flesh and Blood; and of course, on the part of Holy Church it is the supreme act of Corporate, Congregational and Bodily Worship, wherein, with voice and gesture and

attitude, together with whole heart and soul, priest and people unite themselves to the Divine Victim.

Holy Communion, in particular, is an act of Bodily Worship, both on the part of Our Lord and of the communicant: Jesus giving His Flesh to be eaten by fallen man, in order that he may rise again and begin to live to God; and each one of the communicants receiving this Heavenly Bread in his open mouth, in his body, in the folds of his flesh, thus being made for the time being, during a few precious moments, the living tabernacle of the Incarnate God, even as was the Blessed Virgin Mary during the nine months of her miraculous pregnancy.

We have just named the Blessed Virgin Mary. Her reply to the angel of the Annunciation: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to thy word*—what was that but a most sublime act of Bodily Worship? Was it not the solemnly spoken surrender of her whole sweet self, body and soul, into the hands of the Holy Spirit, for the performance of God's holy will?

In the mystery of her Visitation to St. Elizabeth, in the first words of her canticle, Mary furnishes us with the best description of what every act of vocal or bodily prayer ought to be: namely, a sound of the lips, a vibration of the whole body, and at the same time a song of the mind, a jubilee of the soul. *My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.* (Luke i, 46, 47.)

Again, what was it but bodily worship on the part of the Blessed Virgin, when she stood

on Calvary, facing the Cross, her whole motherly frame pulsating with unspeakable sorrow and compassion for her dying Jesus?

The consummation of their sacrifice in the midst of the most cruel torments, in union with our Lord Crucified, was, on the part of the holy Martyrs of all succeeding ages, a most glorious act of bodily worship.

The personal prayer of intercession of Our Lord in heaven as the *Christus assistens pontifex futurorum bonorum*—"an high priest of the good things to come" (Heb. ix, 11), and as "a Lamb standing as it were slain" (Apoc. v, 6): what is it but a bodily prayer, a showing forth of His Wounds which He received for us, a repeating with utmost insistence to His Divine Father?—"With these I was wounded in the house of them that love me" (Zach. xiii, 6).

It were grievous error to imagine that our contemplation would be more excellent, were it, like that of the angels, performed without participation of our bodily organs. No doubt the contemplation of God by the Saints in Paradise, as they now enjoy it, is more perfect than it was during their bodily lives on earth, because then they walked by faith, they saw then as in a glass dimly, whilst now they see God face to face: nevertheless their present contemplation is not more perfect than it will be "in the rebirth" (*in regeneratione*) (Matt. xix, 28), after the general resurrection, when their souls will have been reunited to their risen, glorified, spiritualized bodies: nay, it is decidedly less so. Man is man, not an angel. He cannot be raised higher than his true self by the tem-

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porary loss of a portion of his natural being, but only by the elevation and transformation and spiritualizing of that portion of his nature. Only when he can meet God in the bliss of heaven, in the integrity and fullness of his nature made whole and transformed in Christ, will man be able to render to his Maker the full meed of praise and accidental glory that God has a right to expect of him.

By overlooking the great and dignified part which bodily worship holds in Christian life, and by giving so much prominence to mental prayer considered as a thing by itself, to be attended to mostly in private, the theorizers about Divine Contemplation have unwittingly wrought twofold harm: (1) they have in a way, and to a greater extent than can easily be realized, robbed solemn public worship of what is its very life, the spirit of internal prayer; and (2) they have deprived mental prayer of its natural auxiliary, the body of the worshipper, and turned it into an enemy. For we cannot get away from this fact, that if our body is not given its due share in acts of Divine Worship, then it will at that very time, seek its own satisfaction elsewhere, thus creating a diversion and thwarting the efforts of the mind that seeks union with God.

Every act of bodily worship ought, as a matter of course, to be made a real, hearty, *felt* act of communing with God: nothing less. Every liturgical prayer sung or recited by the priest in the celebration of the Divine Mysteries; every Psalm sung by the choir-monk in his stall; every *Pater* and *Ave* told on their beads by lay-

brothers or lay-folk, in church or out of church, in Latin or in the vernacular; every sign of the cross and genuflection, every ejaculatory prayer; *a fortiori* every attendance at Holy Mass, or any of the other sacred functions, ought to be on the part of the Christian, a deliberate, intentional and eager communing with God. Only such bodily worship does justice to God Who exacts it, to Holy Church who orders it, and to the Christian who performs it.

CHAPTER X

FURTHER OBSERVATIONS ON THE GREAT WORTH OF BODILY WORSHIP

COMMUNING with God may be attempted, and occasionally practised, apart from the Divine Office, under the most varied and apparently the most unlikely conditions—in the midst of strenuous manual labour, amid bustle and jostle and the loud talk of others; in the street, on country roads, in railway carriages. The last time I was in London, as I walked out of the British Museum, I saw a business man pass through the crowd, a portfolio of documents under his left arm and a small rosary in his right hand. He moved swiftly and quite unconcernedly, and as absorbed in his prayer as though he were in a wilderness. Is there, indeed, for the soul a greater wilderness than a crowd? There, one may feel quite alone with God. One knows full well that, as far as men are concerned, one is of no account: why not, then, turn the mind towards God and pray to Him? Unless it be done in an ostentatious manner (and who would do that but a Pharisee?) nobody will take the least notice: people are too engrossed in their own concerns.

Still, it remains true that, if there be a place where, and a time when, Divine Contemplation ought to be particularly practised, it is in the place and at the time specially set aside for Divine

Worship—that is to say, in the Church, at the time of office. So true is this, that the practice of communing with God in the privacy of one's own chamber, or anywhere else, ought to be, really, a corollary to, or prolongation of, what has been begun in the Church.

It was with a live coal of fire, taken by the Seraph from off the altar in the Temple, that the lips of Isaias were purified in order to render him capable of entering upon his prophetic mission. In like manner, it is with this live coal of fire, taken by the priest from off our altars—the sacred Body of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament—that the lips of the Christian ought to be purified, and his heart set all aglow with the love of God, before he starts out upon his weekly or daily mission of edification among his fellow men. After a fervent communion, a man ought to be able to retire to the privacy of his apartment, or go to the public resorts of men, and still find a way of keeping united to God. It was after Sunday Mass and Holy Communion, it was with such a provision of spiritual viaticum, that our forefathers, in the lowliest walks of life, used to take up with fresh courage their task of earning in the sweat of their brow, bread for their growing family.

Too much praise cannot be given to Bodily Worship. It is only through its acts that one is enabled to carry out to the letter the injunction given by our Lord *ever to pray and never to faint* (Luke xviii, 1), because it is so much easier to sustain, in some form or other, than is purely mental prayer. Besides, it is by acts of bodily worship that man takes his proper place and dis-

charges his solemn office as priest and pontiff of this material universe, making it what it ought to be—a temple to the glory of its Divine Maker. By means of the Sacred Liturgy, the Christian, instructed by Our Holy Mother the Church, lays hold of the succession of the hours by day and night, and of the succeeding seasons of the changing year, and gives a tongue to the material elements of the world, making them yield due praise to the Lord of all.

In this connection it ought to be to English Catholics a subject of deep gratification that Westminster Cathedral is, by competent authorities, pronounced to be by far the finest modern church in England, perhaps in the world; a building really and naturally religious, a cathedral—according to the dream of Cardinal Vaughan—not only to worship God *in*, but to worship God *with*; a building so impressive in its unfinished state, that some would prefer to see it remain so, fearing (wrongly, as I think) that its due vesture of ornamental stone and designs may detract somewhat from its severe beauty.

In his book on the Cathedrals of Northern France, Mr. T. J. Bumpus gives this account of a ceremony in the cathedral of Rheims at which he happened to be present (this was, of course, before German Kultur exercised its influence on the noble edifice):

“It was Rogation Sunday, when most of the young people go to their first communion, and a large confirmation by the archbishop took place. The latter was one of the most impressive ceremonies I have ever witnessed in a Continental church. The magnificent cathedral was com-

pletely filled with a dense crowd (always to my mind in itself an affecting spectacle), and every step or column or grille was occupied by eager crowds, clustered like bees. From noon till five the mitred Cardinal archbishop continued to circle from the high altar down to the west doors of that long building, administering the rite to successive lines of candidates. Twelve attendant priests assisted him in his arduous task, two monsignori, in purple, holding open his cope. The archbishop's robes were the most splendid I ever saw worn by an ecclesiastic, and his throne, which an emperor might covet (crimson, velvet and gold, with large white plumes), occupied the spot where a long line of Kings had sat at their coronation. The female candidates were all in white muslin, with long veils; the youths wore each a white silk maniple on the left arm, edged with a broad fringe of gold. All the while the great organ in the north transept beautifully played (with a pause now and then when a litany was chanted and joined in very generally by the young people) continuing to pour forth its notes, now seeming to die away amidst the vaulting and anon making the fabric vibrate with its thunders.

“The concluding tableau was most imposing. The archbishop, divested of his mitre, came down from his throne to a footstool in front of the altar, with all his suite posed round him; the canons left their stalls, the six priests who officiated at the altar knelt around it in their golden copes, with other lesser officials many in number. The altar itself, gorgeous with rich candelabra, the gifts of successive monarchs, became a blaze of light. I had noticed a great

flickering of candles behind the grilles round the *arrière cœur*, and at this moment fifty of the most meritorious candidates filed in, each bearing a long lighted taper, and added themselves to the kneeling crowd. The two marvellous windows at the west end began to blaze with emeralds and rubies as the sun declined and tinged the clouds of incense that rose up when the glittering monstrance was elevated. The great bell of Rheims, heard above the jubilant notes of the organ, added its voice, with a few, deep, solemn thrilling tolls, and the ceremony was over."

I hope it will not be considered as an anti-climax if from this gorgeous description I invite the attention of my readers to an account which appeared in the *Tablet* of January 18th, 1919, over the signature of E. Rambert. It is entitled "Vespers in the Alps."

"I was staying at Hanghaumalp, in the Catholic canton of Uri, and, after supper, the first evening I was there, a *boubo*, or shepherd-lad, planted himself before the *châlet* door, and began to sing with his whole soul, as if he wanted to be heard far off. We paid no particular attention to him, thinking of him as just some happy boy giving vent to the joy of his heart. It rained next evening, but the *boubo* came out again, and, just as he had done the night before, sang loud and long, not pausing for full a quarter of an hour. As I listened more attentively I caught some of the words he sang; they were in a foreign tongue, and I inquired what they were and was told they were the words of a "Vespers." Further questioning brought me the information that, there being no chapel on the mountains,

and consequently no evening offices, the *boûbos* did their best to replace them.

“What,” I asked, “is the same thing done at other *châlets*?”

“Yes, it is the custom of the country,” was the reply.

When the little lad had finished his Vesper song, I asked him to tell me what the words were, and with great simplicity he recited the first five verses of St. John’s Gospel and some prayers and invocations of the saints. I asked him to write it all out for me, which he said he would do if I could wait till next day. And next day, accordingly, he brought me a well-written, faultlessly spelt copy of his beautiful Vesper prayers, the writing a formed hand.

“That evening his Vespers touched me as they had not done before. Other shepherds had I seen at devotion, but not like this child’s prayers. When the wind favoured, he told me, he could hear the shepherd at the Oberalp, but, on those evenings, the shepherd there could not hear him.

“And, this evening,” I asked, “was it you that heard him, or he you?”

“Ah!” he answered, “neither heard the other: the streams are too full.”

“But those clear, penetrating notes, the head notes of the shepherd calling in the mountains, still rose, whether response returned or not, floating in that childish voice, up above the noise of the torrent, like the echoes of bells in the hills forming an orchestra, placed at irregular distances, and melting and continuing each other’s sound as an accompaniment to the voices rising up to the place where wells the Eternal Word,

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speaking to the hearts of those who dwell on the heights, above the winds and waters that are below."

CHAPTER XI

BODILY WORSHIP OF LITTLE CHILDREN AND DISTRACTED PERSONS

WE have to offer a last remark on Bodily Worship, considered in its general aspect. There will be, a little further on in this volume, a whole chapter on the important question of "Distractions at Prayer;" but we must anticipate it here, to the extent of showing how, when we are so vexed by distractions as to be absolutely unable to give ourselves up to mental prayer, it is bodily worship—in particular, vocal prayer—which saves the situation for us.

Take the case of a priest who happens to be a prey to involuntary distractions during the whole of his Mass and Divine Office (not an imaginary case, as we know but too well): provided his conscience render him this testimony, that he has gone through it all, to the best of his ability *dignè, attentè ac devotè*, as the Prayer before the Office puts it, he may remain perfectly assured that he has discharged his obligation and that God is pleased with him.

Dignè—that is to say, without levity of manner or unseemly precipitation; *attentè*—doing his best to prevent his imagination and senses from ranging far and wide, and carrying him away from the present occupation of meeting God and praising Him; *devotè*—with an actual stirring of love, as much as he is capable of, ac-

ording to the grace of God that is given him. Provided a priest performs his sacred office under these conditions, all is well, even though he may not find actual consolation in the performance.

The primary object of divine worship, whether by bodily prayer or pure mental orison, is not our own gratification and enjoyment, but the praise of the Divine Majesty. In heaven perfect bliss and full enjoyment are necessarily inseparable from the act of praising God. It cannot be so for us whilst we are still on earth, and in our present state of infirmity. But what of that? Provided God indeed be praised, provided He be pleased, we ought to feel satisfied. *Dicite justo quoniam bene!* O man of good will, remain assured that all is well and that thou shalt yet reap the fruit of thy faithful labours. (Is. iii, 10.)

St. Angela of Foligno, in her book of *Revelations*, makes this interesting confession in regard to her own self: "Bodily worship supposes the concourse of voice and of the limbs: one speaks, one articulates sounds, one makes signs of the cross and genuflections. This form of prayer I never abandon. There was a time when I wished to suppress it altogether for the sake of mental prayer; but then, sleepiness and sloth would intervene, and I was losing the spirit of prayer." (*Revelations*, ch. 62.)

Has the choir-nun who understands Latin a great advantage in the recitation of her Office over one who does not? St. Teresa thanked God that she did not understand a word of the Office she had daily to recite. Doubtless, the possession of the Latin tongue is some advantage to her, but it is not so very great after all. It

is true that, in theory, she can follow the meaning of all she reads in the Psalms and Lessons ; but as a matter of fact, how does she stand in practice? Do not distractions, for nine-tenths of the time, rob her of actual attention to the meaning of what she is saying or singing in choir? In reality, as far as actual devotion is concerned, there is very little difference between her and her Sister who knows no Latin.

In his *Theologia Mystica Practica*, Gerson observes that, in the performance of the divine psalmody, there is sometimes more devotion where there is less knowledge, and that love is allowed to come in where knowledge is bidden to stop at the door. Wherefore he would have all those who engage in the performance of the Divine Office imitate persons who, though but little skilled in music, take great delight in hearing the sound of the instruments. This is as much as telling us that, in this as in so many other things, we should be as little children. For who is less skilled in music than they?—yet it may be doubted whether the greatest artist in the world derives so keen an enjoyment from it as they do. Thus should we take delight in the mere act of devout vocal prayer and singing of the Psalms, even though we cannot always keep our mind fixed on their literal meaning.

Whilst speaking of little children and their devotions, I feel impelled to say something more in regard to them ; for their vocal prayers and reverent demeanour in Church, as well as those of ignorant and simple folk, are genuine acts of divine contemplation. The whole process has God for its direct object, and who shall dare to

contend that it does not attain Him? These lowly ones of the flock of Christ raise their minds and hearts to God as well as they can, and give Him praise as well as they know how ; and the loving God testifies to His being pleased with their simple worship by granting them spiritual comfort and diverse graces. Clever people who, perhaps, plume themselves upon the fine speeches they are wont to make to God in their mental prayers, may happen to be very far indeed from being so closely united to Him in the bonds of love as are these little ones, whose somewhat crude performance they eye with a slight cast of disdain. More than one illustrious servant of God, now raised to our altars, made it his practice, whilst on earth, to beg of God certain favours through the prayers of little children, and was wont to obtain thus what might not have been granted him otherwise.

Last year, on a week-day, shortly after Christmas, an incident occurred in our village of Buckfast, which entertained and edified us. The little Catholic children of our school had evidently been telling their non-Catholic playmates of the Board School, about the wonders of the Christmas Crib in our Church. All at once—like a flight of birdlings that circle in the air, and then, all together, make for a certain tree and settle on it, and there chirp to their hearts' content—these children, Catholic and Protestant together, about thirty strong, bore down upon the Church, burst into it tumultuously and yet reverently enough: the Catholics making the sign of the cross and the genuflection before the High Altar, the non-

catholics awkwardly trying to imitate them. They crowded around the miniature grotto, to the grievous annoyance of an old lady whom they disturbed in her devotions. They said some prayers aloud ; then those who knew some verses to the Infant Jesus recited them ; then there was a hush as the Brother sacristan, coming upon the scene, took in the situation, and turned the electric light full upon the grotto, to the infinite delight of the little ones. Then they made their comments.

This was really divine contemplation : collective, cumulative, divine contemplation : What of it if the ox (they called it a cow), and the donkey, and the black king, and the little angels with wings, came in for a good deal of their attention ? Baby Jesus was the centre and the hero of it all ; to Baby Jesus they said their prayers, and recited their verses, and sang their carols. For they sang. Oh ! how these dear children did sing ! Their piping voices rose high and penetrated the stillness of the cloister and attracted several old monks, who thought that some function was going on in the Church. And so there was indeed : King Jesus was holding a levee of His young courtiers.

Finally, when they had feasted their eyes and their little hungry souls on the marvellous Crib, and sung to their hearts' content, with one accord they rushed out of the Church and scattered through the village, shouting as they went : "We have been in the Church ! We have been in the Church !" Doubtless this surprise visit of theirs to Our Lord had been to them quite an event, and there is no telling how Jesus spoke

secretly to their innocent hearts, nor how deep the impression has been, nor what it may lead to in after life.

Who would not admire the knowledge of human nature which the Catholic Church, guided by the Holy Ghost, displays when she speaks to the ignorant in signs and beautiful images which they can understand? "In a picture," says St. Gregory the Great, "they who know no letter may yet read."

A Protestant lady who, as a nurse, had wide experience of the ways of children, remarked once that they are all born Catholics, and take quite naturally to pictures and medals and rosaries, and she sadly added: "It has to be taken out of them." Alas! good lady, the pity that you should think so! "But we are forbidden to worship images." So we are: but listen again to the same St. Gregory the Great: "It is one thing to adore images, and another thing to learn from them what we must adore." (*Greg. Magn. Ep. ix*). Does not Our Heavenly Father know what is good for His children? See what a picture-book He gives them to look at! This gorgeous world of sunlight by day and starlight by night, of sea and land, of snow-capped mountains, and hills and vales and rivers, of forest and meadow, with shrubs and trees and flowers and all forms of animated life. Pictures, all these, which rightly used will lead us to God and not away from Him; and so also are meant the pictures in our pious books, and on the portals of our cathedrals, and in the interiors of all our churches; at once for the delight and edification of God's children, big and small, learned

and ignorant ; but more especially of the little ones and of the simple-hearted.

Man will have pictures : if not sacred ones, to speak to him of God and of the Saviour and of the Saints, then profane ones. Your thorough-

In touching on this question of the use of pictures of his horses and of his dogs, of famous jockeys and prize-fighters and actresses, and (the irony of it) of the false, impure gods of antiquity ! His growing boys and girls may make their meditations before Venus and Adonis.

In touching on this question of the use of pictures, we have not strayed away from the subject in hand—Bodily Worship considered as one of the parts of Divine Contemplation.

CHAPTER XII

DIVISION OF BODILY WORSHIP

THE acts of bodily worship fall naturally enough into three distinct groups: (1) All the sacred rites and ceremonies of the Church; (2) Certain public, or semi-public, or private devotions, which are not imposed by the Church; (3) Austerities of the flesh, either imposed by the Church, or self-imposed, or inflicted by Divine Providence, making our bodies a living sacrifice with Our Lord Crucified. In the first group of acts the most salient character is their being of divine or ecclesiastical institution; the second bears upon it the stamp of popular inspiration; whilst in the third, the strictly personal element is more in evidence.

I. First and foremost, then, among the acts of bodily worship, come all the sacred rites and ceremonies of public divine worship as ordained by our Holy Mother the Church. Such are the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the Canonical Hours of the day and night, the celebration or collation of the Sacraments, solemn blessings and solemn processions and the like functions, ordered to be made at certain times of the year or on certain feast-days, such as Candlemas, the Rogations, Palm Sunday, Corpus Christi, or the solemn supplication of the Forty Hours.

These public acts of divine worship usually take place in buildings of more or less vast pro-

portions, reared and set apart and consecrated for distinctly and exclusively religious use. They are conducted with proper display of special ornaments, in the midst of the concourse of the faithful, to the accompaniment of both vocal and instrumental music, as was customary in the Temple at Jerusalem under the Old Dispensation. It is even held by some authorities on the subject, that the Gregorian melodies which have been handed down to us from remotest Christian antiquity, were originally adapted from the melodies of the Synagogue, in use at the time of Christ and His Apostles. Be this as it may, there is now in all our Churches great and small, an adjunct to divine worship which could not without difficulty be dispensed with, I mean the organ, a whole orchestra in itself.

At the same time as this picturesque and æsthetical form of collective or congregational prayer charms the senses and captivates the wandering imagination, it has the advantage of laying under contribution the whole material universe and employing its elements in the worship of God. Stone, wood, iron, brass, silver, gold, precious pearls, diamonds ; all sorts of linen and silken fabrics ; the arts of embroidery, ornamental writing, stained-glass, painting in all its branches, sculpture, architecture : all are pressed into service and contribute to the splendour of divine worship. The very steeples are made tuneful with the melody of the bells, sending out on the four winds of heaven their summons and message to hundreds and thousands of Christians scattered in cities, villages and hamlets, causing their loving hearts to beat with joy, or

sorrow, or alarm, in supplication or in thanksgiving, for the living, for the dying, for the dead: thus bringing home to everyone the pulsations of the life of the whole Church, and at the same time feelingly illustrating the great dogma of the Communion of Saints.

Eloquence, sometimes of the highest order, more often homely and popular, adds its charm to the grand display. The humblest parish-priest is a father to his flock, and finds in his love for the souls committed to his care, and in the sublimity of the divine Gospel, an inexhaustible fund of simple eloquence. At the altar, or in the pulpit, the priest is the leader in the grand act of collective, cumulative, divine contemplation, when all join at the same time in the same mystery of faith and open their hearts to the same impressions of divine love.

About these acts of collective and cumulative divine contemplation, Dionysius the Areopagite says (*De Hierarchia Coelesti*, cap. 1). "It is by means of such material emblems that our unfledged minds are rendered capable of contemplating and representing the heavenly hierarchy. The visible ceremonies of divine worship tell us of splendours which are invisible; the perfumes pleasing to the senses represent the sweetness of spiritual consolations; the shining lamps are the symbols of mystical illumination; the feeding of the mind has its emblem in the doctrinal exposition of the gospel; the divine, peaceful harmony of the heavenly choirs is figured by the various orders of the faithful; and our union with Christ, by the reception of the Holy Eucharist."

II. A second group of acts of bodily worship is made up of a large variety of other public, or semi-public, or private devotions, which the Church does not, as a rule, prescribe to her children, but of which she greatly approves.

Such are pilgrimages or devout visits to the Holy Places where some mystery of our religion took place, in Palestine, in Rome, at the Martyrs' tombs, or wherever effects of the mercy of God have been manifested, as, for instance, at Lourdes. These pilgrimages may be performed singly by individual persons, or collectively by more or less large crowds of people.

Such, again, are pious exercises like the Way of the Cross, the more or less dramatic recitation of the Rosary, the May and October devotions; solemn novenas preparatory to certain feasts; vocal prayers accompanied with genuflections, prostrations, devout kissing of holy relics or pious pictures, the wearing about one's person of medals and devout emblems, pious songs in the vernacular, ejaculatory prayers, etc.

We must also refer to this group, as real and distinct helps to popular devotion, and therefore to divine contemplation, the mystery plays and miracle-plays which delighted our forefathers in the Middle Ages; and, in our own days, the celebrated Passion-play of Oberammergau, which, before the war, periodically attracted from all parts of the world, hundreds of thousands of spectators, a large proportion of whom were non-Catholics, and made such a deep religious impression upon them all.

The humble way-side shrines, and the more or less elaborate calvaries still to be seen in many

Catholic provinces on the Continent ; the statues or pictures of the Madonna, with a lamp in front of them, in the streets of Italian cities ; the pious forms or salutation in use in Spain, Ireland, Tyrol, the Catholic Swiss Cantons and some other thoroughly Catholic countries ; all these help materially to create a religious atmosphere, and to keep men of good will in touch with the supernatural.

III. The third group of acts of bodily worship is made up of austerities of the flesh, whether spontaneously self-inflicted, or humbly received at the hands of God through the workings of natural agencies, or, finally, prescribed by Holy Church : inasmuch as they contribute to make our bodies, in the words of St. Paul, *a living oblation, holy, pleasing to God* (Rom. xii, 1).

Note the special aspect under which these penitential acts are viewed here : namely, that of a homage to God, a veritable act of divine worship ; at the same time as they are acts of necessary repression or castigation of our sensuality, as we shall see later on (in a subsequent volume), when we treat of Saintly Action.

Such are the observance of the fasts and abstinences and vigils ordained by the Church ; the voluntary wearing (with due permission of the spiritual director) of the hair-shirt, the cincture or bracelet with steel points inside, scourging oneself with disciplines made of whip-cord, or iron chains, or nettles ; all bodily pains coming to one through illness, accident, old age, the severities of the seasons, the privations of poverty, the hardships of necessary labour, the malice and cruelty of wicked men.

All these bodily pains, whether self-inflicted or not, if accepted with resignation and borne with meekness and patience, in a spirit of sacrifice, in union with our dear Crucified Saviour, will indeed make our bodies a *living oblation, holy, pleasing to God*, even though, at the time, under the strain of bodily pain or of anguish of mind, we cannot pray much mentally. We are then in a state of prayer: thus, to suffer is to pray.

To this group belong also the act of religious profession, that is to say the taking of the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, in a religious order approved by the Church, together with the consequent life of self-renunciation which it entails; the solemn vow of chastity of clerics in Holy Orders, and the many acts of self-renunciation imposed on them, but more especially on priests, by their sacred calling; those private vows, occasionally taken, with due permission, by persons in the world, as well as the strict observance of the laws of Christian continence, temperance and modesty, corresponding to each one's special state of life; and, in general, such a noble and modest composing of all our attitudes and motions of the body as befits persons who know that they are ever in the presence of the Divine Majesty—nay, that they are themselves its living, breathing temples.

It will not be out of place to say here a few words about the purpose of religious life, and its place in the great scheme of divine praise instituted by the Church.

From the very beginnings of the history of Christianity we see that the Holy Ghost inspired

some of the more fervent brethren with the wish to withdraw from the world and dedicate themselves exclusively to the work of divine contemplation. When this movement had spread and regularized itself, introducing among the faithful a permanent *special* form of life, the Holy Ghost inspired the Church to lay hold of it, and to sanction it with the seal of her supreme authority. The communities of holy men and pious virgins thus formed the Church took under her special guidance and protection, and she officially entrusted to them the duty of praising God, solemnly and perpetually in the Divine Office, day and night, in the name of the whole congregation of the faithful.

It is true that the secular clergy, sub-deacons, deacons and priests, are also entrusted by the Church with this work of the daily praise of God, in the name of all Christian people, by the recitation of the Breviary: but priests as a rule are isolated, each one being compelled to say the Office where and when he can, as convenience and the call of other and often heavy duties permit. On the other hand, choir religious, whether monks or cloistered nuns, have their various occupations so disposed that nothing is allowed to interfere with the Divine Office, which is solemnly discharged at set hours of the day and night, and at which they attend in a body, in the Church, with due pomp and ceremony; thus emulating by the fervour of their worship of God at the altar, the burning love and loud hosannahs of the angels and saints around the throne of the Lamb in the glory of Paradise.

Thus the life of an ideal community of Bene-

dictine monks, of Carthusians, of Carmelite nuns, of ever so many other contemplative fraternities, is fully occupied with the work of divine praise discharged as a corporate obligation, perpetual, and practically uninterrupted, all their other occupations being subordinated to this great end. Can anything on earth be thought of more sweet, more beautiful? The very austerity, which is a necessary accompaniment of such a life, brings into still higher relief its heavenly beauty and supernatural sweetness.

The strict enclosure of most religious communities, and the grilles of their parlours, have given rise to no end of misunderstanding and silly or malevolent talk on the part of heretics. There is this to be said: When the Church places her contemplatives behind the bars of their cloisters, it is not with a view to take away from them the power to return to the world, but simply to protect them against the world's invasion of their sacred precincts. The locks and grilles are not for keeping them in but for keeping the world out: so that there may still be a few small bright spots on earth where consecrated virgins, assembled together in the name of their heavenly Spouse, and with Him in their midst, can enjoy the liberty of true children of God.

To sum up these considerations on bodily worship: is not the fact that the Church entrusts her contemplatives with the solemn performance of the Divine Office, the best proof of what a high and large place bodily worship holds in her estimation? In reality, the sacred Liturgy, as instituted and ordered by the Church,

is the most admirable blending of the two forms of divine contemplation, bodily worship and mental prayer. May we not hope that the time is coming when, not only religious but all classes of Christian people, each in its degree, will understand this more perfectly, and will begin to live again the liturgical life in all its richness and abundance?

CHAPTER XIII

OF MENTAL PRAYER IN GENERAL

MENTAL Prayer, in contradistinction to Bodily Worship, is, as we have already seen (Ch. ix), the prayer in which, the body being at rest, the mind seems to be alone concerned in the work of divine contemplation.

In extolling bodily worship as much as we have done in the preceding chapters, it has been far from our intention to belittle mental prayer.

Great as is the dignity and worth of bodily worship, much greater still is the dignity and worth of mental prayer. It must be so, considering that mental prayer is the very life and soul of bodily worship, even as our soul is the very life of our body, and that just as the capacity of our soul surpasses the range of its life in the body, so also does mental prayer reach out far beyond the conditions and limitations of bodily worship.

Mental prayer is essentially the adoration of God in spirit ; that is to say, the act of a created spirit going forth to meet the Uncreated Spirit ; for, says our Lord : *God is a Spirit and they that adore Him must adore Him in spirit and truth* (John iv, 24), that is to say, must perform this act of meeting God in as intensely spiritual a manner as is possible in present conditions. Thus, by mental prayer, we come as near as possible to the mode of action of the pure spirits.

It will, therefore, be no surprise to us to be told that mental prayer is the Alpha and Omega of Christian life: its very beginning, its progress, its climax or consummation; that mental prayer is the heart, the soul, the blood, the very breath, one might almost say the all-in-all of true Christian life; so that where there is no mental prayer, there is no real Christian life, but only, at best, an appearance. Where there is little mental prayer, there is little Christian life; where there is much mental prayer, there is an abundance of Christian life.

Whosoever, therefore, wishes to begin really to love God with his whole heart and soul can do so only by the use of mental prayer; and whosoever wishes to make progress in the love of God, must continue to use mental prayer. Stop mental prayer and you stop love! Deprive yourself of mental prayer and very soon you will cease loving God, even though you should say no end of vocal prayers and sing no end of psalms in choir. If the spirit of mental prayer does not breathe through all your acts of bodily worship, God will say of you as he did of the Israelites of old: *This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.* (Matt. xv, 8.)

It is by mental prayer more than by any other means that we are made Godlike, that we transform ourselves supernaturally into God's likeness. It is the act by which we are allowed to look into the shining mirror of the Godhead: dimly, at present, it is true, *as though through a glass darkly* (1 Cor. xiii, 12), and yet very truly. We stand, so to say, the mirror of our

soul facing the mirror of the Divine Essence: "Mirror against mirror," says Ruysbroeck, so that we may catch the reflection of its rays. Of course, for this purpose, the mirror of the soul requires to be kept very bright. No film of secret self-seeking must be spread over it; no layer of dust or of anything that can tarnish or soil it, such as unruly passions or inordinate attachment to creatures, must be allowed to settle upon it. Then will the shining of God into the soul really take place. It will be effected suddenly, in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye, in an *immediate* manner, straight from the heart of God into the soul of man; and the vivid light will carry with it an intense heat to vivify the recipient as much as the light illumines him.

St. John, speaking of the glory which awaits us in Paradise, says: *Dearlly beloved, we are now the sons of God, and it hath not yet appeared what we shall be. We know that when he shall appear, we shall be like to him, because we shall see him also as he is.* (1 John iii, 2.) We shall be made like unto God supernaturally, by contemplating Him face to face; we shall be invested and wholly permeated with the splendour of the Godhead shining full upon us: without let or hindrance we shall be filled with the influx of His divine life in sanctity and bliss ineffable: we shall, in a word, be changed into divine beings. The beginning of this process of our active transformation into God's supernatural likeness has to take place during our lifetime, while we are here on earth: this is inaugurated by the reception of the Sacra-

ments, and it is furthered by the help of mental prayer.

The object of our contemplation in mental prayer is twofold: first, the Divine Essence of the Most Holy Trinity, and, secondly, the Sacred Humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ. Of this twofold object did the psalmist speak when he said: *I have lifted up my eyes to the mountains.* (Ps. cxx, 1.) These two sacred objects of our contemplation are, so to say, the Mont Blanc and the Himalaya range of mountains of the spiritual world; and the mystics are the true mountain climbers, fearless and undaunted, eager by dint of mental prayer to scale the heights and explore the immaculate fastnesses.

We may also compare this twofold object of our loving contemplation to two wonderful bunches of grapes, more marvellous than those of the Promised Land, to which we have access and on which we are allowed to feast. The more we eat of them by means of mental prayer the more insatiable we become. Or again, let us liken them to two marvellous honeycombs eternally dripping with infinite delights in the eager mouths of those who apply themselves to divine contemplation. *Open thy mouth wide,* says God, through the Prophet, *and I will fill it.* (Ps. lxxx, 11.)

In reading what mystical writers have to say about divine contemplation we must be very careful to bear in mind the distinction between *the acts* of contemplation and *the states* thereof.

When God is the object of one's loving attention only for a few passing moments, there is an act, and only an act, of divine contemplation.

Even beginners are, by the grace of God, capable of performing such separate, occasional acts, recurring more or less frequently. But when a fervent Christian, by the help of the Holy Spirit, sustains his loving attention to God during a somewhat protracted period—say, some hours or days at a stretch—there is, at least for the time being, *a state* of contemplation. As a rule this is vouchsafed only to such as are already advanced in the spiritual life. And, again, it may be but a transitory state, recurring at very long intervals, or it may be a kind of solidly confirmed habit or gift. In this last way it is found with the perfect only.

We may safely say, therefore, that all mystics, all Christians of goodwill, upon whatever rung of the ladder of perfection they stand, are capable of performing act of divine contemplation; whilst only the more advanced can sustain it for any length of time, and this, in proportion to their progress in the spiritual life.

This explains the caution given by spiritual writers, and especially by Gerson, not to try and go beyond one's actual gift of grace, not to attempt to fly higher than one's wings will warrant. In the same strain St. Benedict gives this direction: "In community let (mental) prayer be brief and pure, unless it happens perhaps to be prolonged by the influx of the inspiration of divine grace." (*Reg. Cap. xx.*)

It is well, when reading books on contemplation, to keep constantly before one's mind this important distinction between acts and states; otherwise, one may be bewildered by apparently contradictory statements, when, in reality, one

author is simply speaking of the passing acts of contemplation, and another is alluding to the habit or state of contemplation, and yet a third may be treating only of some very special states of it. One may even be speaking of contemplation in its sublimest sense—that is to say, of the obscure meeting of the soul with God in perfect nudity of spirit (as we shall see later)—and yet not be careful enough to avoid confusing this, in the mind of the reader, with humbler yet genuine degrees of divine contemplation.

CHAPTER XIV

DIVISIONS OF MENTAL PRAYER

THE present chapter is an important one. It may happen that some persons will consider it revolutionary, because it unceremoniously sweeps out of the way a good many conventional divisions; yet I hope that the greater number of readers will see it rather as of a conservative or justly reactionary character, inasmuch as it aims at bringing us back to the bedrock foundations of human nature as God made it and the common workings of divine grace.

Strictly speaking, there are but three species of mental prayer. Discursive Prayer, Affective Prayer, and the Prayer of Quiet. All varieties of mental prayer, whatever their names, can be and ought to be, reduced to one or the other of these three species.

Discursive Prayer is the mental prayer in which the Holy Ghost moves the mind of a fervent Christian to many considerations concerning the Divine Essence of the Blessed Trinity, or the mysteries of our Blessed Lord.

Affective Prayer takes place when the Holy Ghost puts a stop to the arguments of the mind, and acts directly on the sensitive faculties and on the will, drawing the soul towards God, with great sweetness and vehemence.

The Prayer of Quiet is when the Holy Ghost

stays even the multiplicity of the affective movements of the soul, and reduces it to silence, but a silence pregnant with unutterable love, in presence of the Divine Majesty.

In its turn the Prayer of Quiet has to be subdivided into two species according as it is wholly passive or only partly so. The Passive Prayer of Quiet is that in which the loving God seems to take upon Himself to do all there is to be done, so that it is not in the power of the contemplative to inaugurate the process of prayer at will; nor can he interrupt it, were he so minded; nor, of himself bring it to a close: all he can do is to acquiesce in it and sweetly to co-operate, as long as God is pleased to favour him with it. When, on the other hand, a man has the power of inaugurating the Prayer of Quiet, and yet retains throughout the free use of his faculties, then it is the Semi-Passive Prayer of Quiet.

The first kind, the absolutely Passive Prayer of Quiet, is the kind of contemplation which St. Teresa, with many other writers, calls by the somewhat disconcerting name of "supernatural"; as though every grade, even the very humblest, of Christian contemplation were not supernatural. (We shall have more to say, later on, about this equivocal term "supernatural" used in this connection.)

Finally, the Passive Prayer of Quiet is, at times, accompanied with miraculous phenomena, such as levitation of the body, suspension of some of the functions of the sensitive life, interior or exterior stigmata of the Sacred Passion, distinct visions or locutions, either imaginative or wholly

spiritual, etc. Then we have properly *Miraculous Contemplation*. To this kind only would I reserve the appellation of "Extraordinary" which has been lavishly and indiscriminately applied, in recent works on mysticism, to any prayer or contemplation above the average.

In order that a state of Prayer be legitimately called extraordinary, it has to be ascribed to an exceptional intervention of God, suspending even the laws of nature. The gifts of Wisdom and Understanding, which all Christians alike receive in the Sacrament of Confirmation, are sufficient to account for the sublimest varieties of the Passive Prayer of Quiet when unaccompanied with miraculous phenomena; therefore, such Prayer of Quiet is ordinary, is indeed due to the common workings of the grace of God, such as is given, or at any rate, offered, to all Christians. Much as the Passive Prayer of Quiet can be called the borderland of the miraculous, the line is crossed only when some of the above phenomena take place. All that is this side of the line is ordinary. Hence I draw this conclusion: all Christians have a right to wish for, and to aim at, and to prepare themselves for, the Passive Prayer of Quiet. This species of prayer, by right, and in the plan of God, is the crowning glory and consummation of common or ordinary Christian life on earth.

Thus, then, finally, we obtain as full nomenclature of the different species of Mental Prayer, the following:

- (1) Discursive Prayer.
- (2) Affective Prayer.
- (3) Semi-passive Prayer of Quiet.

- (4) Passive Prayer of Quiet, and
 (5) Miraculous Contemplation.

We shall do well to keep resolutely to this simple and natural division. It covers the whole field of Divine Contemplation and will be found to answer all practical purposes. It will enable us to discern, in others as in ourselves, the operations of the Holy Ghost, and also to understand what competent mystical writers have to say on the subject.

There is no such thing as “acquired contemplation” in contradistinction to “infused contemplation.” This division introduced by some modern writers cannot be upheld. If it be a question of Christian contemplation it is infused. Divine Contemplation in the sense of mental prayer is all infused, all supernatural, all a pure gift of God; always, in all its degrees, in all circumstances, whether as separate act or acts, or as a state, it is infused direct from God into the soul. *No one can say: The Lord Jesus, but by the Holy Ghost.* Much less could anyone, without the Holy Ghost, gaze lovingly upon Him *on Whom the angels desire to look.* (1 Pet. i, 12.)

What is—or at any rate may be—acquired, is the habit of preparedness to divine contemplation.

We must not forget that divine contemplation is the finest product of our joint life with God. The Holy Ghost Himself operates it in us. It is His action, His own doing, with our co-operation. First, we have to be made proximately capable of receiving such a divine operation: this is done by the efficacy of the Sacra-

ments, which infuse into us the virtues of Religion, of Faith, of Hope, of Charity, and the Gifts of the Holy Ghost. Thereafter it devolves upon us to prepare ourselves. This we do by purity of life, interior recollection, willingness to allow God to have His own way with us, and actual and persevering responsiveness to His secret inspirations and motions. This is our part in the joint venture of Divine Contemplation.

We must also carefully distinguish between contemplation itself and what are only its preliminaries, such as spiritual reading, methodical application of our faculties, using certain industries, placing ourselves under favourable circumstances, taking certain attitudes of body and mind. Now all these things depend on our own initiative and are a part of Saintly Action (as we shall see in another volume). Wherefore, these preliminaries, though conducive to contemplation, must not be confused with it. These acts certainly may pass into a habit, an acquired habit, and thus favour the action of God in infusing Divine Contemplation; but they are not the thing itself, and there is no such thing as *acquired* divine contemplation.

The question may be asked: does it or does it not lie with us to procure Divine Contemplation? Now, after what we have just said, it is not difficult to perceive that this is merely a question of words, for it must be answered in the affirmative or in the negative according to the special aspect considered.

Inasmuch as divine contemplation is a pure gift of God, and cannot be acquired by any efforts of ours, it is clear that we must answer this question

in the negative; but, inasmuch as it lies with us to prepare ourselves for this gift of God, to accept it and to make the most of it, then it is to be answered in the affirmative.

To make this still clearer, let us have recourse to some homely illustrations. We may compare the soul to the fireplace in a house. It lies with the tenant of the house to keep the flue free of accumulated soot, to remove ashes, and to lay dry sticks and other kindling materials in the grate, so that at the touch of a match the whole will burn up. It is God's part thus to light our fire, and He is sure to do it as soon as we have done our part: God waits upon our good pleasure.

Again we may liken the soul to a lamp which the Christian can clean out, provide with a wick, and fill with oil; so that when a match is applied it will catch fire and illumine the room or the path one has to tread. It certainly depends on the interested party either to dress the lamp properly, or to let it be uncared for as did the foolish virgins of the parable in the Gospel. So it lies with us to keep our soul clean by banishing from it all frivolous or sinful affections, and to provide the wick of an attentive mind and the oil of good will; but it lies with God alone, Who is the master of His gifts, to touch the soul with the flame of His Holy Spirit, and thus set the lamp burning with the light of divine contemplation. This God never fails to do whenever He finds a lamp well trimmed.

To use yet another simile: it is for us, as it was for Abraham (Gen. ch. xv), to take the victims which the Lord has asked for, to slay

and divide them, and to drive away the birds of heaven that seek to prey upon the flesh of our holocaust. It is for us to present, on the one hand our mind, on the other our will, and to drive away resolutely all importunate distractions, until such time as it please the Lord to cast upon us the mystical sleep of divine contemplation, and to pass between the divisions of our offering and consume it with fire, at the same time consoling us with mysterious words and assurances of the beatific vision which awaits us in the Promised Land of Paradise.

CHAPTER XV

ON THE THRESHOLD OF DISCURSIVE MENTAL PRAYER

ON the threshold of a treatise on Mental Prayer written in our days, there must present itself inevitably the question of method ; although not a trace of method appears previous to the sixteenth century.

It is in itself a very small question when we take a proper view of mental prayer and divine contemplation in their fullness. At best it concerns beginners, and not even all beginners, this question of how to start on the quest of the divine encounter ; how to handle one's refractory teams of faculties, when they have not yet been thoroughly broken in ; how to employ to one's own satisfaction and advantage the set half-hour told off for meditation in our modern programmes of piety.

I do not say it in a carping spirit ; but prompted by deep conviction, born of life-long observations, I feel bound to assert that too much importance has been assigned to method in the preoccupations of modern piety. It has been made by some writers the all-in-all of the adoration of God. It has been made an end in itself, whilst it is but a means, and even then an artificial one. It has been used, no doubt unconsciously, by some directors, as a means of spiritual domination, to chain down and keep under their

hands, and hold back on the threshold, souls whom the Holy Spirit urged to go forward, urged to run, urged to soar to the very heights of Divine Contemplation.

By all means, let one who feels the need of a method make use of one ; and let him use it as long as he finds it helpful ; but let him discard it as soon as he can possibly do without it. One who has been lame for a time is not told to go on using a crutch after it has ceased to be necessary. In his search after God, in his dealings with Him, let the fervent Christian take, as soon as he can, to the unceremonious way of the little child. See with what an artless, unpremeditated, spontaneous start, or burst, it throws itself towards the object of its love. The great trouble with most methods is that they tend to render one self-conscious, spiritually speaking : one never loses sight of oneself.

In his *Souvenirs et Causeries* the Marquis De Ségur introduces a poor woman, eighty-five years of age, Colette by name, who delivers herself of this charming piece of information : " I am very stupid, I know. At home, when I was little, we were eleven children and had to be put to work very early. I never could learn to read and write. Occasionally I grievously feel the want of this, but I must say, it never interfered with my prayers : rather the reverse. I talk aloud or under my breath with the good God ; I tell Him all that comes into my head, just as it comes. Books, I fancy, would be in my way for this. They would overmaster me. Now I want to be free in my prayers. I have always spoken my mind to my gossips, friends

and neighbours, in fact to everyone: why should not I do exactly the same with the good God?"

Very remarkable this outburst of brave, old, ignorant Colette! St. Teresa herself does not speak otherwise. To be free in one's prayer, to be oneself, to speak one's mind, to pour out to God one's heart, unchecked and unfettered by any convention: is not this the ideal of genuine mental prayer?

Let us lay stress on the fact that, as we understand it, and as we treat of it in this volume, mental prayer, whether discursive or otherwise, is not an artificial contrivance, nor is it confined to a set time, be it a quarter of an hour, or half an hour, or a full hour, or several hours. It is a living process embracing and pervading the whole life of a fervent Christian; a living process which we may liken to the growth of a tree and its putting forth, in due season, periodically or even perennially, of flowers, leaves and fruit.

Naturally a tree must be planted in congenial soil, must be duly protected against destructive agencies, must be fed with dew and sunshine and air from above, and with what nourishment it can draw up by its roots from the earth. In such conditions the vital process of the growing of the tree goes on uninterruptedly, though secretly and silently. In very much the same way does the process of mental prayer and divine contemplation go on in the soul of good will. It is not a matter of half-hours at set times, it is a matter of the whole life, down to its humblest details: a *state* of mental prayer is established, and divine contemplation becomes the very substance of one's life.

Indeed, separate acts of mental prayer are either signs, or fruits, of a state of contemplation already firmly established in the soul; or, they are ordered, and naturally tend, towards the establishing of such a state; otherwise, I do not see why they should be performed at all. It is non-apprehension of the necessary connection between isolated acts of mental prayer and the state they are meant to establish, that has so lamentably narrowed the outlook of modern piety and made it such a poverty-stricken, cramped, abortive thing!

In very truth we may liken the relation between the contemplative soul and God, to that which necessarily exists between the tree and the whole mighty process of nature. We live in the sunshine of the felt and loved presence of God, rooted in the Sacred Humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ (*radicati et superædificati in ipso*, Col. ii, 7). Now, just as the vital process of the growth of the tree is associated with the whole work of nature at large, and depends on it, and is a part of it, so does the process of mental prayer link each soul which applies itself to it with the mighty scheme of divine grace in the Church at large, and associate it with the very life of the glorified Saviour and of the Blessed Trinity Itself. Here is mysticism, indeed, if ever mysticism be!

We come to the root of the matter when we observe the importance of holy reading and meditation (apart from any method) with a view to divine contemplation, and especially with a view to Discursive Prayer. St. Thomas (2 2 *quæst* 180) considers these two acts of holy

reading and meditation as necessary parts of the vital process of which we have been speaking. We may call these functions "the feeding of the tree by its roots."

The Church makes her contemplatives read a great deal, and of course expects them to assimilate, by thoughtful consideration, what they read. The Priest with his daily breviary; the Religious with his or her choir-office; the fervent Christian, who follows in detail the development of the sacred liturgy throughout the year—what readers they are obliged to be! Into what rich soil they plunge the roots of their attention and affections! What essential juices they constantly imbibe and assimilate! Then there are the books of God—Nature, the Holy Scriptures, the Holy Crucifix, and the human heart—to be diligently conned by them. And they may add the books written by the servants of God to elucidate these books of God. What a vast field for holy reading and thoughtful consideration is opened before us!

On the other hand, the world, too, imposes a mighty deal of reading on its votaries: Periodicals without number—filled with deliberate lies, or suppressions of the truth, to suit the needs of political parties; with unwholesome, poisonous, vitriolic, hellish *faits divers*; faked history; with garbage literature of infinite variety, pandering to all the morbid appetites of an effete society;—and books of demi-science, with trumpery articles on all the branches of human speculation, creating the impression that man, puny man, has solved all the riddles of the universe, fathomed all the great deeps above his head and under his

feet, and weighed God in the balance and found Him wanting!—man, that thing of yesterday, whose body, to-morrow, rots in the grave, while his soul goes to its judgment!

From such mental seed what harvest can be expected but utter bewilderment, anarchy of thought, desperate materialism with its attendant evils? A plentiful crop of these evils we see ripening under our eyes, promising a terrible reaping in the near future. The horrible world-war we have just gone through; the present labour unrest with its arrogant, unreasonable demands; Bolshevism rampant everywhere: what are these but the fruits of that precious so-called liberty of the Press? This is not liberty, but most unbridled license—license to utter, declaim, print, read, disseminate broadcast, without check or restraint, monstrous, immoral, blasphemous, subversive doctrines. A stronger social order than ours would soon suffer disintegration under such powerful dissolvents. As for the effect on the individual—it is simply frightful.

Do most people in our midst, now-a-days, know whether there is a God? or whether they have an immortal soul? or whether there is such a thing as moral responsibility? They are no longer quite sure of anything. They hold that it would be wrong for anyone to rob *them* or kill *them*: but it is not so clear to them that, for instance, adultery is a crime. One thing only looms big before their mental vision: they must have what they call “a good time”; they want to amuse themselves—and following out this simple programme, they proceed to make a hash of their lives. And under all

their dissipation, there is a sadness bordering upon despair.

If a Christian dabbles in this sort of literature, he unfits himself for divine contemplation. If he must touch it, through no choice of his own, and under pressure of circumstances, he must surround himself with every sanitary precaution that prudence can suggest, otherwise he runs a mortal risk: he is like a man who would rashly handle poisonous gases, or powerful acids, without putting on a mask to protect his face, or gloves to save his hands.

There are those among the educated and wealthy who think that they cannot possibly find a place in the order of their day for holy reading. Let me tell them bluntly: You do not want to; you have no relish for it. That is the plain truth.

No time for holy reading! If those same unworthy Christians would write down an enumeration of all the items of newspapers, novels, and other frivolous reading they contrive to get into a week, they would be amazed at the quantity. Now it is simply a case of, *Ceci tuera cela*: this will kill that. Either holy reading or pernicious reading: it is clear that the two cannot thrive together: either holy reading and as its fruit, divine contemplation; or no holy reading at all, and, as a fatal consequence, no divine contemplation at all.

CHAPTER XVI

ON THE PRACTICE OF DISCURSIVE PRAYER

DISCURSIVE Prayer is the mode of mental prayer familiar to the greatest number of Christians during the greater part of their lives. It may not be amiss, therefore, to give some suggestions as to how to begin this sort of prayer, and how to proceed in it.

What is it you want to do? You wish to have speech with the good and loving God even as though He were here? Is He not here? Even as though He heard and took notice of all you are going to tell Him? Is not this the case? Even as though He wished you to speak to Him and liked you to do so? Can we doubt that this is so? You want, also, to listen to God speaking within you, as though He really had something to tell you. And has He not? As though you had set your heart upon not missing one of His interior monitions. And as though you highly appreciated the honour of this communing secretly with God and made it your delight?

Now, what will you say to God?

Say anything you like—anything that is to the purpose, or even things which are apparently not to the purpose. Let us go again for our instruction to the children, these great masters and models in the art of dealing with God with simplicity.

I have just heard this charming story.

Some children had been told to speak to Our Lord simply, in their own way. In the afternoon a small boy was very late in returning from school, and after half an hour his mother set out anxiously to seek him. She found him coming out of the church, and when she asked him what he had been doing, he replied: "Oh! I went right up to the front bench and told Our Lord a robber story!"

This brings to my remembrance a story, long buried in the catacombs of my mind. Some thirty years ago I was a missionary among the wild Indians of North America. In the Osage tribe, at a place called Pawhuska, I had a flourishing school kept by Franciscan Sisters, who were very zealous in teaching my dusky neophytes, young and old, the rudiments of Catholic Faith and practice. One day, as I was passing through the Sisters' garden I was surprised to find, all by herself, a little girl of six or seven, gravely walking up and down. "Coaina, my child," I said to her rather severely, "why are you not with the other children?" "Oh!" she answered, in a confidential whisper, "I am talking to the Great Spirit." "Indeed; and may I know what you are telling Him?" "I tell Him I would like to see Him and kiss Him!"*

* It would not be surprising if these two stories brought upon me an avalanche of others quite as charming. In this case they will be very welcome. I shall select the very best, and try to induce my publishers to let me make of them an Appendix to this work in its next edition, if there be one. The stories should be short, well told, and to the point: i.e., illustrating the

That is just the way. You want to talk to God? Do it, simply do it, talk! talk with the simplicity of a child. In this connection I know nothing sweeter, more suggestive, more helpful than the example set by the Carmelite nun of Lisieux, Sister Thérèse de Jésus, "The Little Flower." Her life related by herself should be read and re-read by all who wish to learn the precious art of sweetly and simply conversing with God.

Conversing with God is an art. It must be acquired; it ought to be cultivated, for it may be brought to a high degree of excellency and effectiveness; as also, if not practiced but neglected, it may be lost; one may lose the cunning of it. "We ought always to pray and not to faint." (Luke xviii, 1.) Prayer, like fire, ought never to be allowed to go quite out, or we may experience trouble in kindling it again.

Do not forget, as I am afraid too many people do, that the very idea of conversation calls for at least two people. In the work of mental prayer the two are, first the loving God, and then yourself, God being given precedence as He is the more dignified. But He is so good, so gentle, so homely and familiar, that you are allowed to open the conversation whenever you wish, whenever it suits your convenience. He is always there, always ready, always willing to listen to you.

Now then, open the conversation: give Him a word of recognition and greeting, and at once directness and simplicity of children's communings with God.

profess your readiness to hearken to Him, and do listen. "*I will hear what the Lord God speaks unto me.*" (Ps. lxxxiv, 9.) God may just be pleased to speak to His servant, to make Himself heard in the secret of your heart. He may want to infuse into you feelings of spiritual joy or sorrow, to impress you with some vivid light: for such is the way of speaking of a pure spirit. If God does so speak to you, oh! then, what happiness! Blessed are you, indeed! Then listen: listen in silence. Do not break in upon God's discourse to you. Let Him have all His say. And even after He has done speaking, still listen; wait for more; beg for more. When you see that no more is forthcoming, turn in your mind what has been said or impressed in you by the loving God. Taste its sweetness, soak yourself in it. Finally, do not fail to express your sense of gratitude, as also your sense of your own unworthiness.

And then, in your turn, when the interior spirit moves you (I mean the Holy Ghost Who is in you as long as you are in the state of grace), do you also, in all lowliness of spirit, speak lovingly to the Lord God. Pour out your heart to Him in burning words. No need of books for that: you want, like old Colette (cf. supra Ch. xv) to say what is in your mind, what is in your heart, not what someone else has thought out and written.

You have plenty to say to the loving God, if only you knew it. Talk to Him of yourself, of your neighbour, of Himself. Here is an inexhaustible fund of conversation.

You will please God whenever you talk to

Him about yourself. He loves that. Tell Him, even as though He did not know them, your troubles, your joys, your fears, your defects and your successes; your wants and wishes; your plans for the future.

We often make the great mistake of pouring into the ears of others what concerns ourselves. They do not like it. They are not interested. They have but little sympathy with us—or none at all. Our most confidential outpourings leave them cold, indifferent; there may even lurk in their very smile a touch of contempt. Never so with the loving God.

He will be still more pleased, if, forgetting yourself, and bearing in your mind and heart the many necessities of others, you make it your business to recommend them to God. Each one of us may bring a large heart and an apostolic spirit to his communings with God; so that without going abroad, or stepping out of our humble employment, we may obtain no end of conversions of sinners and precious favours from Our Lord for the whole Church. Many a humble lay-brother, many a poor old woman or pious youth has done so. Oh! how beautiful is such prayer of intercession on the part of the confidential friends (as we may call them) of the good God!

Still, you will please God most, and obtain most for yourself and the whole world, when, moved thereto by the Holy Ghost, you will lose sight of yourself and the whole world of creatures, and speak to God of His Own Divine Self, in the pure prayer of adoration: applying your mind and your heart solely to Him.

Then is the time to play melodiously the harp of your heart and to dance in measure before the Ark like King David. Then is the time to emulate the highest choirs of Angels in heaven, and to sound out of your whole being the loud song: Holy, Holy, Holy, the Lord God!

And perhaps the moment will arrive when a divine silence will be cast upon you, and you will be seized with an overwhelming sense of the presence of God, of His absolute loveliness, of His infinite sanctity! Lie there, before Him, motionless, O Christian soul, as though annihilated; know that although you seem to be doing naught, great things are being done in you: there is being wrought a union of your whole being with God, an infusion of Him into you, a transformation of your whole self into His likeness, beyond word or thought, and thereby a praising of God, a glorifying of the Divine Majesty incomparably greater than could be rendered by any other work of your own!

But are we not here anticipating somewhat? Yes: we have been carried away by the logical sequence of things over ground which must be retraced and explored more slowly.

Many years ago I came across what purported to be one of the unedited letters of St. Teresa, written towards the end of her life. She was giving to Father Alphonso Alvarez, her spiritual director, an account of her mental prayer. She related how, that same morning, on going to the Chapel for Mass and Holy Communion, she was vexed by the untidy ap-

pearance of the cloister, due to the fact that masons were engaged upon some repairs in the convent. On crossing the chapel entrance, she signed herself with holy water and tried to compose her thoughts and apply them to her Saviour present on the Altar: unfortunately her sharp eyes caught sight of some stains of plaster on the floor: all her irritation came back. Then also she began to speculate upon the length of time the masons were taking over repairs that could have been done much more promptly. Meanwhile Mass had begun and was well under way. As the Sanctus bell rang she tried again to collect her thoughts: all to no purpose. Even when she was bending low at the moment of consecration to adore her beloved Lord, she caught herself ejaculating almost aloud: "Oh! those masons! And the price they charge for doing nothing!" In great confusion when the moment of Communion arrived, she went up to the altar-rail and tried to make amends to Our Lord for the vagaries of her mind, and then she came back to her place and endeavoured to make her thanksgiving: but she found herself deeply interested in the worn sandals of the Sister who was kneeling in front of her. To escape this new distraction she closed her eyes, burying her head in her hands: the thought of the masons returned more besettingly than ever. In sheer despair, she opened a book so as to fix her eyes upon some holy picture. She lighted on one of the ugliest that she had ever seen, and said to herself: "What a sin to give the dear saint such hideous features! Whoever saw a saint with squinting eyes, a long nose, and

such thick lips?" and then, turning fiercely upon herself: "Who ever made such a thanksgiving after Holy Communion?" And she concluded her account by saying playfully: "You see, my Reverend Father, how your spiritual daughter is progressing in the ways of mental prayer."

Reader, if this is not a genuine letter of Saint Teresa, it deserves to be. At any rate it has done me good service and encouraged and comforted many a soul of good will.

CHAPTER XVII

THE PLAGUE OF DISTRACTIONS

THIS Chapter is written for the consolation of souls of good will.

The difficulty of distractions at prayers is to be met with in all the degrees of the spiritual life, even in the very highest, as is shown by the lives of the Saints.

It is a very serious trial to souls of good will. They find it hard to bear when from end to end of their prayers, do what they will, they are vexed by these importunate distractions as by so many flies.

To souls who are not very generous, to the weak and ignorant, this trial may become a sort of scandal and an occasion to relax their endeavour. They will say: "What is the use of my trying to pray? What is the good?" They had set out to find God and taste His sweetness, but He did not come to meet them, nor did He give them anything. They cannot understand it.

First of all, we might ask those weaklings: Is it not your own fault if you encounter so many difficulties in the act of praying? If you come to it with a frivolous mind; if you lead a life of dissipation; if you bring to God an unmortified interior, can you hope that He will be pleased to pour into you His heavenly consolations? The milk and honey and wine and

delicate fruits of the spiritual life require an empty vessel, and a clean one.

There are also those people who, when the world does not want them any longer, or when they can no longer enjoy its pleasures because of advancing age, turn to piety after a kind, and seem to say: "Now, my God, your turn! Let me see what enjoyments you can give. I have heard so much of the consolations of piety, I want to have my share of them:"—forgetting that in order to taste and see how the Lord is sweet, there is preparation of soul to be made.

Finally, there are also those, mostly ignorant people, who are not even aware that they have distractions at their prayers, though they are simply eaten alive with them as with a plague of locusts. There is a story to the point. The great St. Bernard was riding through a forest, and a peasant trudged at his side to guide him. The Saint spoke, as was his wont, of the things of God, and lamented bitterly his inability to pray without distractions. The peasant, much surprised, asserted that as for himself, he never had any. "You are a wonderful man," said St. Bernard, "but let me see if you are not mistaken. If you recite the *Our Father* without distraction, I will make you a present of this horse." To win such a prize was to the poor man the chance of a lifetime. He eagerly closed the bargain, made a great sign of the Cross, and began. He had not gone half way through the prayer before he stopped short with—"I say, Father, you will give me the saddle with the horse, won't you?"

Without stopping any longer to argue the

case of the tepid souls, we must acknowledge that distractions at prayer and meditation happen to the most faithful servants of God, and are to them a heavy cross. What have we to say about this? That it is indeed a very profitable thing for them. When a man happens to be full of distractions from beginning to end of his holy exercises ; when, do what he will, he does not succeed in fastening for a single instant the gaze of his mind upon God, or in drawing out of his heart a single effusion of love, can he be said to have performed an act of divine contemplation? Decidedly so.

If he has not consented to those importunate distractions, if they have displeased him, if he has fought them as well as he could, he has done the work of a true contemplative. He wished to meet God, he set out on this errand, and strained every nerve to accomplish it ; therefore God was the immediate object of his attention : and that is the very essence of Divine Contemplation. He went to the trysting place of God, and although Our Lord did not see fit to show His blessed countenance, yet there is no doubt but that He was there, well pleased with the anxious quest of Himself, by His faithful servant.

Whether God should show you His sweet face, and make you hear His loved voice, and fill you with consolation, is for Him to decide. When He treats you with apparent harshness, leaving you to your own weakness, in the dark, a prey to distractions, utterly desolate, quite crushed down in the dust, He is treating you as fully grown in spiritual life. He is secretly

feeding you with the marrow of lions, with the bread and wine of the strong. He is, in spite of appearances, adorning your soul and enriching it with countless merit.

Never say that a half hour, wholly spent in the unwelcome task of struggling against sleepiness, or of chasing away distractions, is lost time. Nay, it is as profitable a half hour as it has been a laborious one. You proved your loyalty, and you gave glory to God, by continuing to seek for Him and to call after Him—at least to desire Him with your whole heart and soul—in the midst of distressing circumstances. When does a soldier most please his king? When, spick and span and trim and happy, with drums beating and banners floating, he goes on parade? Or when, black with smoke, stained with earth, covered with blood, his own or that of the enemy, he is fighting for king and country?

What matters it that during the whole time of some pious exercise your imagination danced the wildest whirligig? That could not destroy the fact that you came there for the sake of God, that you were in quest of Him, that He was then truly the sole and immediate object of your occupation. What happened in the way of distraction was outside the essence of your human act: it was purely accidental, wholly involuntary; it passed no deeper than the surface of the soul, if I may so speak, and it did not detract in anything from what you intended to do: you were really seeking God, and God was really, though invisibly, meeting you.

The soul of good will, occupied wholly, dur-

ing a holy exercise, with the effort of chasing away distractions, resembles Abraham, when, as related in Genesis (Ch. xv.) he had prepared a sacrifice to the Lord, and was kept till evening busy driving away birds of prey which endeavoured to snatch at the flesh of the victims. God at last appeared to him, and told him how pleased He was with him: then the fire of heaven came down upon his sacrifice and consumed it.

When a good soul, passing through certain of the more distressing phases of this trial of distractions, comes to us and tells us: If I only was sure it was not my fault! If only God was not offended by this! I am so afraid it is on account of my sins!—you may rely upon it that all is well with that soul. God is only refining it as gold in the furnace. It is with her as with the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph, when in great trouble and confusion, blaming themselves as though guilty of unpardonable negligence, they were seeking the Divine Child among their friends and acquaintances, and not finding Him!

What! can this possibly be one of the forms of passive purification of which mystical writers speak? Yes, even so, especially when, do what one may, one does not succeed in giving comfort and peace to the poor sufferer—and yet he remains of good will and perfectly obedient to his spiritual director. He suffers, and is willing to suffer, and God, for a wise purpose, does not permit him to see the perfection of his dispositions.

In the ordinary train of Christian life, the

plague of distractions at prayers comes in spells, like bad weather. When it rains, we do not say: Oh! there will never be an end of it! We know very well that the sun will shine again: so we wait with what patience we can until the clouds roll away. Rain does a great deal of good: it is one of the chief providential agencies for bringing forth the fruits of the earth. So also is it with the plague of distractions when it settles on the soul of good will. What a holiday when the sun shines again! What joy for the soul when the clouds roll away! Mary Magdalen at the empty tomb of her beloved Lord will not be comforted even by the Angels in bright garments: she turns away weeping and addresses, as she thinks, the gardener. "If you have taken Him away . . ."

Jesus utters just one word: "Mary!" It is enough! Then, what a change from tears of sorrow to joy inexpressible! Thus is it at last with the soul, who, through darkness and desolation, perseveres in prayer.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE LITERATURE OF GOD

IF I had to sketch out the plan of an ideal course of holy reading with a view to divine contemplation, upon lines so large and generous that it might serve for a lifetime, I would proceed in this wise :

First of all, I would have such a course of holy reading to revolve around the Holy Scriptures, rearranged to suit the convenience of the contemplative soul.

The Bible is the book of God; nay, it is a whole library; a whole literature in itself, quite apart from all others, and covering a period of time not less than two thousand years, possibly much more, and going to the very root of all things; a literature of which God Himself is the author, whilst the human writers whose names are inscribed on each of the books as they succeed one another, are but the scribes to whom their contents, as well as those of the Divine Traditions, were dictated by God Himself: *Spiritu Sancto dictante*, says the Council of Trent, *cum utriusque unus Deus sit auctor*. (Sess. IV.) The contemplative is in search of God: where can he hope better to find Him than in God's own books? There God Himself speaks of Himself, and of all His doings with the much-loved but wayward human race, and with each soul individually.

This literature of God consists, according to the *canon* or official catalogue, definitely settled by the Council of Trent (Sess. IV.), of forty-six Books in the Old Testament, and of six Books and twenty-one Epistles in the New: the Historical Books being in the main placed in their order of production, and the Moral or Sapiential ones, as they are called, which belong exclusively to the Old Testament, being set together in one group.

I give here the order in which I would suggest that the various parts of Holy Writ might be rearranged for the use of the mystic in his striving after Divine Contemplation.

I would put the New Testament before the Old. As the Old Dispensation is abolished and we now live under the New, the Scriptures of the Old Testament, which at the time of their writing, were prophetic as well as historical, are now of most use in our spiritual lives as allegories of the Church of Christ and of Heaven: but this full and proper mystical meaning of theirs can only be got at in the perfect light of the Divine Gospel, as the Fathers of the Church—particularly, St. John Chrysostom, St. Gregory Nazianzen, St. Augustine and St. Gregory the Great—have eloquently demonstrated. In regard to the contemplation of Our Lord, it must be owned that in the splendour of His Divine Personality as we see It in the Gospel page, it is rather the New Testament which reveals to us the Old, than *vice versa*. By the light of the New we discover in the Old, meanings which would otherwise have remained unsuspected, and which

decidedly add to our knowledge of the Divine Saviour, inciting us to love Him still more. I may be allowed to refer the reader to what I have already said on this subject in Chapter X of *Mysticism—true and false*; also in Chapter X of *The Mystical Life*. Something further will have to be added in my next volume on *The Loving Contemplation of Our Lord*.

Now, the books of the New Testament I would propose to the contemplative in the following order :

(1) The Gospel according to St. John : because there, from the first, is presented to us the Divine Teacher of the art of mental prayer, in His true and full Personality of the Only Begotten Son of God, the Word made Flesh.

(2) St. Luke's Gospel : because it has sprung from the lips, nay, from the very heart, of the blessed Virgin Mother of our Lord, and is redolent of the sweet perfume of this Mystical Rose.

(3) Then St. Matthew and St. Mark, who give us more, perhaps, the Sacred Humanity of our Blessed Lord, without, however, allowing us for a moment to lose sight of his Godhead.

(4) Then the Apocalypse, which is the Gospel of Jesus risen from the dead and seated in glory, and from His high throne presiding over the providential government of His Church on earth.

(5) Then the Acts of the Apostles, where we see the Gospel teaching of Our Lord illustrated by the doings of his mystical Bride the Primitive Church.

(6) Then the Catholic Epistles of SS. James,

Peter, John and Jude, giving voice to the *Ecclesia docens* at this early date, under the direct inspiration of the Holy Ghost.

(7) Finally, as a grand and magisterial summing up and interpretation of the spirit and of the mystical doctrine of the whole New Testament, St. Paul's wonderful Epistles.

As regards the Old Testament, let us repeat that for the purposes of Divine Contemplation, it comes not before, but after the New. To be read usefully, to be rightly understood in its bearings upon our individual piety, it must be viewed in the full light of the Holy Gospel, in the splendour of the Word made flesh, since He it is who gives the Scriptures their unity and fullness of meaning. "*I am the Alpha and Omega, the (first) beginning and the (last) end*" he declares. (Apoc. i, 8.) "*It is written of me at the head of the book,*" he says in Psalm xxxix, 8. And the Apocalypse again shows Him to us as the Lamb who breaks the seven seals of the mysterious book on the altar of heaven (Apoc. v, 8), of which book both Testaments are but a faint foreshadowing.

This being so, we may group the books of the Old Testament thus:

(1) The larger Historical ones, namely: The Pentateuch of Moses (i.e. the five first books of the Bible), Josue, The Judges, the four books of Kings, the two Paralipomena and the two of Esdras. These books, in their mystical meaning, so dear to the Fathers of the Church and some medieval Doctors, symbolize the episodes of the Christian's journey through the wilderness of this life to the Promised Land of heaven.

Leaning on this oracle of St. Paul: (1 Cor. x, 6, 11) "Now these things were done in a figure of us"; "Now all these things happened to them in figure: and they are written for our correction,"—leaning, I say, on these words, the contemplative finds marvellous food for his piety in the history of the People of God, not only in its beginnings, but also throughout its checkered career. For this view of the Sacred Books I would specially recommend the works of Richard of St. Victor (Migne: *Patrologia Latina. Tom. 196*); one of which, the *Benjamin Minor* can be obtained in an English translation (Edmund Gardner, New Medieval Library, London, 1910).

(2) The smaller historical books: Ruth, Judith, Esther, Tobias, Job—all so rich in mystical meaning. Ruth is the loving Christian soul, Booz the Divine Goodness; Holofernes is the devil, Assuerus is the King of glory. As for the books of Job and Tobias I would at first be satisfied to have them studied from the point of view of their purely literal meaning: for even thus, these holy personages, Job and the two Tobias, do represent to us in a vivid manner the life of the mystic on earth in the midst of the world, in the holy state of matrimony, passing through the most trying vicissitudes. Only as an after treatment or *retractatio* of the subject would I recommend the mystical interpretation of Job in the *Moralia* of St. Gregory the Great: it will then prove very acceptable indeed.

(3) And here comes the very paradise or garden of delights of the true contemplative.

It is made up of these books: The Cantic of Canticles (interpreted in part by St. Bernard); The Psalms (interpreted by St. Bruno, the founder of that great school of sanctity, the Carthusian Order); Isaias, that anticipated Gospel; Proverbs; Wisdom; Ecclesiasticus.

(4) For the further purification and illumination of the soul, I would recommend Ecclesiastes, Jeremiah, Baruch and the twelve Minor Prophets.

(5) Ezechiel, Daniel, and the two books of the Machabees I consider as forming, historically, a kind of immediate preface or introduction of the New Testament; and, therefore, I would have the contemplative soul look upon them as pointing spiritually to the second advent of our Lord, when He shall come to judge the living and the dead, and to inaugurate the feast of His Eternal Nuptials with His Bride, the New Jerusalem of the Blessed. The wars of the Machabees serve as a fine illustration of the heroic courage which, at the end of the world, will be required from the small band of the faithful, in their resistance to Antichrist: a contingency which may not be very far off.

Such would be our Bible of the Contemplative.

To priests and to those of the laity who read their Bible in the Latin text, I would recommend, in preference to all others, the edition of the Vulgate of the Abbé Fillion of St. Sulpice (Paris: Letouzey et Ané), because, though retaining, for the sake of reference, the old division into chapters and verses, it contrives nevertheless to put into evidence the natural

divisions and subdivisions of the matter, and the difference between historical prose and the rhythmic effusions of the prophetic spirit. Thus set clearly before us, the inspired word of God takes quite a new and clearer aspect. I look upon it as an inspiration of genius on the part of the learned Sulpician, to have given such a text of the Bible. Had he done nothing more in the field of Biblical studies (which is far from being the case), he would have richly deserved the gratitude of all lovers of the Word of God. It is my humble opinion that this work, now in its sixth or seventh edition, deserves to be known and spread all over the world, and should be in the hands of every priest and every ecclesiastical student.

As for the spirit in which this reading should be carried out, it need hardly be said that we ought to work in the field of the Scriptures with a view solely to discover in them, and bring out, and publish to all the world, the message of divine love they contain. Whosoever loses sight of this end is a great fool. O my good Lord, how many such fools have been, in our days, busy with thy Holy Writ!—learned men, of great talent and research, glib of tongue and of pen, and yet fools!

It must be observed that the fervent Christian is a whole God's breadth apart from the Modernist. The former takes up his Bible-reading in no mood of hypercriticism. Of course, at the hours when he is attending to the sacred page for learning's sake and when studying for the purpose of teaching others, he is as exacting and severe and conscientious a critic

as any man ; but when he reads for his own edification, to comfort his soul and render his union with God still greater—in a word, when he reads for the express purpose of Divine Contemplation—he finds it is enough for him to know that the canon of the inspired books has been definitely settled by the Council of Trent, and that the same unimpeachable authority has decided that the Vulgate, such as we possess it, is the official text, and all sufficient for every practical purpose. Nor does he fall into the mistake of those who make the herculean task entered upon by the Biblical Commission an excuse for laying aside the Holy Scriptures, crying (as I have heard it with my own ears): “ Oh! I shall wait till the difficulties have all been cleared away. What is the use of troubling about it before this has been done?”

One might as well say : “ Oh! before I practice my religion I shall wait till all the difficulties raised about it by true or false science have been answered.” There will never be any end of difficulties being raised; meanwhile a man has to live and to die, that is to say, work out his eternal destiny. In the same way we may take it for granted that there will never be an end to the labours of the Biblical Commission. It will continue to issue, from time to time, its learned decisions, long after we shall have gone to our reward : therefore we cannot afford to wait. Let us take our Bible—the Book of God—as it is, as it is handed to us by Holy Church, and be satisfied to use it thus, for to it do the words of St. Paul apply : *All scripture inspired of God is profitable to teach, to reprove,*

to correct, to instruct in justice ; that the man of God may be perfect, furnished to every good work. (2 Tim. iii, 16, 17.)

The Modernist does not find God in the Holy Scriptures which he handles so rashly and irreverently, though God has written Himself in them and wishes to be sought in them—and found. The truth is that the Modernist does not seek Him or wish to meet Him: what he seeks is purely and simply self—his own conceited little self, his Lilliputian self, which he idolizes and would fain propose to the worship of the whole world, instead of God. But to him that seeks God with simplicity and love, in the Sacred Writings God reveals Himself.

The revelation contained in the Holy Scriptures and the Divine Traditions forms a fathomless luminous abyss, into which man's spiritual eye penetrates but to a very limited depth. This suffices, however. We feel therein the divine presence, hidden and yet resplendent. Our Blessed Lord Jesus Christ and the Most Holy Trinity are presented to us in the manner in which we can best bear to contemplate them, in our present condition. In holy reading and devout consideration we obtain a glimpse of the fringe of the garment of our God and take hold of it, and kiss it rapturously: then we sigh after the blessed hour when all the shackles being broken, all the veils rent, all the mists dissipated, we shall at last see Him, Whom we love, face to face, in the full radiance of His infinite Sanctity and Goodness. O God! Beloved! when will this be?

CHAPTER XIX

THE LITURGICAL BOOKS OF HOLY CHURCH

OUR Holy Mother the Church has a twofold mission in the world: first that of attending officially to the solemn worship of God; then that of administering to the faithful the good things of God, namely His divine Revelation and His Sacraments.

In the discharge of this twofold duty the Church has, under the special guidance of the Holy Ghost, composed or compiled, for the use of her ministers, her liturgical books, six in number, namely: the *MISSAL*, the *BREVIARY*, the *MARTYROLOGY*, the *RITUAL*, the *PONTIFICAL* and the *CEREMONIAL OF BISHOPS*.

It has been said: "*Lex orandi, lex credendi*": that is to say, the prayers of the Church show forth the whole content of her faith. Indeed she has contrived to press into her liturgy all the dogmatic teaching which came to her either by the written word or by divine tradition, and to give it a popular, poetical, spectacular and highly dramatic expression.

Unfortunately, since the dawn of modern times, heralded by Protestantism, the liturgical sense has been gradually waning among Christians. The Church has not the same facility as of yore to develop the pomps of her solemnities and to penetrate into the very life of the people. It must be frankly admitted that the

general state of society, in our days, is a formidable obstacle in the way of a thorough revival of the liturgical spirit. In spite of the powerful movement of reaction which was inaugurated by Dom Guéranger, which has been gathering momentum during the last three quarters of a century, the liturgical spirit is still too much in abeyance. The collection of the liturgical books as an object of pious and intelligent study is almost wholly a *terra incognita*, a buried and hidden treasure to the generality of educated Christians—even sometimes to those who should know best its wonderful value, because constantly called upon to make use of one or other of these books. It is one thing somehow to use an instrument and quite another thing to employ it to the highest advantage.

Therefore, in our ideal course of reading with a view to Divine Contemplation, immediately after the inspired word of God as it is in the Bible, I would place the liturgical books. In this chapter I aim at showing briefly what an inexhaustible fount of inspiration in prayer and of spiritual enjoyment lies at hand in these books.

The first three, the Missal, the Breviary, and the Martyrology, are closely connected, as they concur together to the one purpose of ordering the official prayer of the Church around its proper centre, which is the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. From the real presence of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament and His mystic Sacrifice on our altars, as from the sun in the high firmament of nature, comes to the Church light, vitality, beauty and fruitfulness. Year after

year, from the first Sunday in Advent to the Saturday of the last week after Pentecost, this sun seems to run its course through the divine Zodiac of the Mysteries of His Advent, Life, Death, Resurrection and glorious State in heaven, until He shall come again, to judge the living and the dead: in reality it is the Church herself, who like a humble and obedient and loving satellite, dutifully circles around the mighty orb, the Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom be glory for ever!

To help us to penetrate below the surface of the liturgical books we should read in connection with them such works as *Les Institutions Liturgiques* of Dom Guéranger; his well known and deservedly popular *Liturgical Year*, and *Le Livre de la Prière Antiquè* of Dom Cabrol.

The Missal and the Breviary have been translated into more or less felicitous English, so that their incomparable collection of prayers are at hand for those who care to use them in their private devotions. In no other way will one be enabled to understand the mind of God and of Holy Church in regard to all the vital issues of either time or eternity. What an education in the highest spirituality it is in our power to give ourselves by such a study! It should suffice to render us great contemplatives and mystics of the first order.

It is a matter of regret that the Martyrology is very little known outside Religious houses. It is a glorious book. To a devout listener it seems to diffuse at the same time an inebriating perfume and a triumphant music. Day after day, from its crisp notices of mysteries and

martyrs and all other species of saints, there is so to say, shaken out, a mingled perfume as of warm bread fresh from the oven, of ripe apples long garnered in a closed room, of generous wine poured out in torrents with the blood of the martyrs, of incense burnt over the glowing coals, of sheaves of lilies and of all paradisaic flowers of sanctity which have bloomed awhile upon this earth of ours and been gathered by the blessed Angels. There is also triumphant melody in these short lines: melody to which the Christian worthy the name can hardly listen without feeling himself raised far above earthly things. Oh! I would the Martyrology were sung, not read, in every Monastery and Convent, irrespective of whether the rest of the office be solemnized or not: beautifully, feelingly, sweetly sung out; not by any one, but by the very best cantor, instead of being, as is but too often the case, tamely and badly read or rather stammered out by some unripe tyro of a Novice, who murders almost every word of the text. The dear Saints deserve better treatment than this. It is martyrdom twice over. The worst of it is that thereby the glorious page loses much of its fascinating beauty, and a great deal of its stirring appeal is wasted upon disgusted, often indignant listeners.

Messrs. Burns and Oates have issued a beautiful *Layfolks' Ritual* with Latin text and English translation. It would be a mistake to think that the Ritual is a book for priests only, it is as useful to know it, for those who receive the sacraments as for those who administer them. If there is a lesson which ought to be impressed

upon us by such a perusal, it is that the very act of receiving a sacrament is first of all and before anything else an act of adoration of the Divine Majesty. It is the act of one who draws near to God, for God's sake, irrespective of any view to self interest. Even in the imperfect contrition of a poor sinner who wishes to receive holy absolution, there must be, of necessity, an initial love of God for God's sake. Besides, in the very act of drawing nigh to God by the worthy reception of any of the Sacraments, we make a confession of His sovereign goodness: we proclaim Him to be the absolute good, the fountain-head from which all good, whether natural or supernatural, perpetually flows: *The Father of lights from whom every best gift and every perfect gift, comes down.* (James i, 17.)

Take only one instance. Do not the Christian man and woman, by the reception of the sacrament of Holy Matrimony, proclaim in the face of the whole world that they wish to abide with God and God to abide with them, in the most secret and intimate and emotional part of their lives? He issued forth at the beginning this command upon the first couple: *Grow and multiply and fill the land.* (Gen. i, 28.) They mean to carry out this command, under His divine blessing: from His hands they desire to receive the natural joys of their mutual love, the fruitfulness *of the womb and of the paps* (Gen. xlix, 23), the virtuous increase of their family, and all the graces necessary for them to carry with alacrity such a heavy burden.

Now if that is not first and foremost an homage of adoration to the loving God, then what

will ever be one? And if it be thus with this sacrament, the lowliest of the seven, since it comes right down into the animal portion of the life of man and woman, how much more clearly can this homage of adoration be predicated of all the other sacraments? Every one of them is for the explicit, emphatic purpose of bringing God into our lives. By a positive act of our free and deliberate will, we open to God the doors of our own being and invite Him to come in and take possession, from the inside, of what is already His by every right, though He has placed it in the hands of our own counsel. Clearly the immediate result is a great personal advantage to us and a distinct gain for our own spiritual benefit. Many discern but this aspect of the transaction: but it is not doing justice either to the intention of Our Lord or to the mind of the Church in the institution and the administration of the sacraments. The act of receiving a sacrament remains, by right, essentially an act of worship of God. Faith, Hope, Charity and often Contrition largely enter into it; therefore it has God in view; it glorifies Him and it stands as our own practical translation of this petition of the Our Father: *Thy kingdom come*. Therefore it is essentially an act of Divine Contemplation.

The Ritual, no less than the Missal and the Breviary, sets in a marvellous light the doctrine I am trying to inculcate, that the mystical life or the union of love with God is for all men, absolutely and indiscriminately, whatever be their age, profession, position in society and accomplishments. Baptism is for all, and Baptism

makes us by right *adorers of God in spirit and truth*. (John iv, 23.) If the baptized adult should fail to become such, it is because he will have put obstacles in the way of the action of the Holy Spirit in him. Confirmation is for all. Now Confirmation arms and strengthens the Christian so that he is enabled to render to God this homage of adoration in spirit and truth, even in the midst of enemies, visible and invisible, and of the conflicts of the world. As for Holy Orders, they make the Christian who received them a captain, a leader among those who thus adore God in spirit and truth and an official teacher of Divine Contemplation.

The Pontifical is the Bishop's book or the ritual of Episcopal functions. Besides the rite of Confirmation and Ordinations, it contains such impressive ceremonies as the blessing of abbots, abbesses, nuns, the coronation of kings, the laying of foundation-stones, the consecration of churches, altars, chalices, and the blessing of bells.

Not to every one is it given to witness even once in a lifetime the consecration of a Church. Many persons are debarred from witnessing even those functions which are fairly frequently performed, such as the blessing of an altar, ordinations, religious professions, the blessing of the Holy Oils and Balm by the Bishop on Maundy Thursday. . . . Therefore, if they wish not to remain in total ignorance of this part of the spiritual treasury of the Church, there is nothing left for them but to read for themselves and picture as best they can with their imagination these gorgeous services. They will be more

than repaid for their pains, by a deeper insight into the life of the Church, that grand mystical drama of the Bride and the Heavenly Bridegroom ; not in the dead past as a matter of ancient history, but in the living present. By the grace of the Holy Ghost they will be enabled to discern their own personal part or concern in the reciprocal love of our Lord Jesus and His Church, whose children we are ; *Come*, says the angel to St. John in the Apocalypse, *Come and I will show you the Wife of the Lamb.*

Most Catholic publishing firms have issued in penny-pamphlet form, in the Latin text with English translation, the rite of the Blessing of the Oils on Maundy Thursday, that of the Blessing of Bells, that of the consecration of a Church and other sacred functions.

Some short liturgical formulæ, when closely scanned with the eyes of a loving soul are a never-ending source of delight. I will point out a few.

DOMINUS VOBISCUM : THE LORD BE WITH YOU. This is the greeting, from the altar, of the Priest to the People ; it recurs also in the Divine Office and in the administration of the sacraments. It expresses the most unequivocal and outspoken wish for the realization of the purest, highest mystical life, in those to whom it is addressed. Now, to whom is it directed ? To a few only ? No, but to all absolutely and without exception. All are greeted with the same sublime wish and each one is expected so truly to take it to heart that he is made to retort in the same vein to the priest : ET CUM SPIRITU

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TUO: THE LORD BE WITH THY SPIRIT. What an exchange of heavenly courtesies is this! But also what a lesson in the doctrine of the mystical life for all!

PER OMNIA SAECULA SAECULORUM: THROUGH ALL THE AGES OF AGES. The Priest and the Christian people deal in eternity. They hardly seem concerned with the paltry years of the present time, except in so far as they have a bearing upon the eternal years which are coming. The mind of the contemplative is raised above the miserable contingencies of the present life: he lives already with God and is given a foretaste of the fullness of enjoyment of an interminable life of glory.

SANCTUS! SANCTUS! SANCTUS! HOLY, HOLY, HOLY! In this simple word thus three times repeated, what an intensity of admiration, adoration and love can be concentrated! Also in such other formulæ as this one, culled out of the GLORIA IN EXCELSIS: GRATIAS AGIMUS TIBI PROPTER MAGNAM GLORIAM TUAM: O GOD WE GIVE THEE THANKS FOR THE GREATNESS OF THY GLORY. What pure, fragrant, disinterested love of God is here breathed out! It is just such a love that God is worthy of receiving from all His reasonable creatures.

Mark yet another and perhaps the most admirable of all: PER DOMINUM NOSTRUM JESUM CHRISTUM: THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. All the prayers and supplications of the Church end with these words, thereby proclaiming that He is the great and only Mediator of Worship and Salvation and that all good comes to us through Him alone.

Each particular OREMUS is a study in spirituality ; each is worthy of special attention for its own sake ; and if duly pressed would yield great store of divine information and edification.

Now I say that a Christian saturated with the grand thoughts these liturgical formulæ suggest, cannot but be genuinely spiritual. There will be no nonsense in his piety, no twist in his mind, no narrow corner in his heart ; the Holy Ghost will find him a fit organ of divine praise and adoration and will not fail to use him, whilst still on earth, for this exalted purpose.

It is therefore evident that a loving and consistent study of the liturgical books both at Church and at home, must be a marvellous help in the work of mental prayer and divine contemplation. No other books will set before us such a dramatic presentment of the dealings of God either with His Church or with each soul individually. The sacred liturgy sets before our eyes the whole order of religion in the past, the present and endless ages of eternity, in a never ending, ever living, ever fresh and new and entrancing panorama, of which the pageant of the years with their recurring seasons and the reposeful alternations of day and night are but a faint image. "

CHAPTER XX

THE WORKS OF THE SAINTS

THE Holy Scriptures having been laid down (in Chapter XVIII) as the sure foundation of all our holy reading and meditating with a view to Divine Contemplation—as the centre around which it will revolve and to which it will be referred and indissolubly connected—as the framework within which it all will find place and be orderly disposed—our Contemplative should, in addition to the Liturgical Books, lay up a store of the best works written by the Saints and other pious personages, on their own account, but not without the evident help of the grace of God, on the subject of our intercourse with Him.

In regard to these latter I would again enforce the golden rule already given as to the methods of mental prayer. I would say: use the books that help you; use them as long as they do help you and not a minute longer. As soon as a book, be it ever so good, has ceased to impress you, to command or retain your attention, to stir up your will, it ought to be laid aside, at least for a time. Later, perhaps, you will feel inclined to turn to it again, and then you will do so with greater relish and deeper insight of its meaning. Books are good-natured, unselfish friends: they never resent being put on the shelf for a time or for good; they are ever ready, after

years of neglect on our part, to pour out their treasures in our lap, the moment we have recourse to them again.

Another application of the golden rule is this : as soon as you feel drawn, by the spirit of prayer, away from what you are actually reading, lay the book aside and follow where the Holy Spirit is leading, and as long as He deigns thus to make Himself your guide. For, says Our Lord : *The Spirit breatheth where He will ; and thou hearest His voice, but thou knowest not whence He cometh and whither He goeth.* (John iii, 8.) It would never do for us to tell the Holy Ghost to wait till we have read our allotted page, or give Him an appointment for another time. It is for the servant to follow at once the inspirations and movements of the Divine Guest and Master.

Now, then, as an almost necessary accompaniment to our Bible of the Contemplative, sketched out in Chapter XVIII, I venture to submit a small list of the books of saintly men, which seem to me best calculated to give help in any attempt at discursive and affective prayer. Where I give a Latin or French title it is that I am unaware of the existence of an English translation of the work ; and where I refer to such a collection as "Migne" or the "Opera Omnia" of an author, it is that I am not aware of the special book in question having been published separately. This rule will hold good throughout all my works.

Besides such books of the Saints as I have already mentioned in the preceding chapter, which have for their direct object the interpreta-

tion of Holy Scriptures, and which would suffice to form an immense library, I would recommend a selection of books which present a concise and connected and suggestive view of Catholic Doctrine. Such are :

The CATECHISM OF THE COUNCIL OF TRENT.
Denzinger's ENCHIRIDION SYMBOLORUM (the latest edition with its invaluable Index Systematicus).

Moehler's SYMBOLISM.

The CATECHESSES OF ST. CYRIL OF JERUSALEM.

The EPITOME INSTITUTIONUM DIVINARUM of Lactantius.

St. Augustine's ENCHIRIDION DE FIDE, SPE ET CHARITATE.

The OPUSCULUM II ET IV of St. Thomas Aquinas.

The BREVILOQUIUM of St. Bonaventure.

St. Francis of Sales' TREATISE ON THE LOVE OF GOD.

Bossuet's DISCOURSE ON UNIVERSAL HISTORY.

Sir Bertram C. A. Windle's KEY TO CIVILIZATION.

The MEDULLA ANIMAE seu INSTITUTIONES DIVINAE of John Tauler.

Then would follow a selection of such other books as give a concrete example of discursive or affective mental prayer, and therefore may be considered as a kind of practical introduction into the art itself of communing with God.

Such are, among a host of others :

The CONFESSIONS, MEDITATIONS, and SOLILOQUIES of St. Augustine.

THE FOLLOWING OF CHRIST, especially the 3rd and 4th books.

THE BOOK OF EXERCISES OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE of Abbot Cisneros.

John Gerson: DE MENDICITATE SPIRITUALI.
St. Ignatius Loyola's BOOK OF THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES.

Father Vincent Carafa's ELEVATIONS TO GOD.
Cardinal Bona's VIA COMPENDII AD DEUM.

A book of SPIRITUAL INSTRUCTION—and other works of L. Blosius.

THE PARADISE OF THE SOUL, by Mello Horstius.

St. Teresa's SEVEN MEDITATIONS ON THE LORD'S PRAYER.

Only after these would I place the special treatises on Mental Prayer, because I consider that the art is not learnt at first by rules and lessons but by practice and experience. Only after a beginning has been made and some progress achieved in Divine Contemplation, will it be possible to derive any considerable advantage from special treatises such as, for example:

St. John Climacus: SCALA COELI.

The MYSTICAL THEOLOGY of the Pseudo-Areopagite.

St. Bernard: DE CONSIDERATIONE.

The BENJAMIN MINOR of Richard of St. Victor.

St. Bonaventure: ITINERARIUM MENTIS AD DEUM.

St. Alphonsus Liguori: PRACTICE OF THE LOVE OF JESUS.

St. Peter of Alcantara: ON THE ART OF MEDITATION.

John Ruysbroeck: THE KINGDOM OF THE LOVERS OF GOD.

Father Nieremberg: ADORATION OF GOD IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH.

Bossuet: ON THE KNOWLEDGE OF ONESELF AND OF GOD.

Ven. De Ponte: THE PRACTICE OF MENTAL PRAYER.

Lessius: DE SUMMO BONO, Liber Quartus.

LA DOCTRINE SPIRITUELLE du Père Lalle-
mant.

Bishop Waffelaert: LA MYSTIQUE ET LA PERFECTION CHRËTIENNE (Bruges 1911).

PRAYER AND CONTEMPLATION, by the late Bishop Hedley (London, Catholic Truth Society).

Each one of these books, small in bulk, great in meaning, is a perfect gem in its way; each can be used for its own intrinsic worth, to lead one deeper into the secret nature of Divine Contemplation, and also as a means to help one to think of God, to realize His nearness to us, to begin lovingly and familiarly to converse with Him.

Then there are certain collections of ready-made prayers of extraordinary virtue to set one's heart all aglow with the love of God.

Besides the official Prayers of the Church to be found in the liturgical books, especially the Missal and the Breviary—to which we have already drawn attention, and which are the very best that could ever be used—I would recommend the following:

The Raccolta, or official collection of the indulgenced prayers of the Church.

The Prayers of St. Gertrude.

J. Gerson: DE MENDICITATE SPIRITUALI.
Pars Secunda.

St. Alphonsus Liguori's VISITS TO THE
BLESSED SACRAMENT.

DE LAUDIBUS SUPERLAUDABILIS DEI of
Dionysius the Carthusian. (Op. Minora, tom.
II.)

DE LAUDIBUS SANCTISSIMAE TRINITATIS, of
the same (ibid. tom. III.)

D. Michael of Coutance's CARTHUSIAN
SPIRITUAL EXERCISES.

IGNIARIUM DIVINI AMORIS of Blosius.

Father Augustine Baker's DEVOUT EXERCISES
(at the end of HOLY WISDOM).

Various Anthologies of religious poems.

LES POÉSIES de Sœur Thérèse de l'Enfant
Jésus (the Little Flower) in appendix to her
Life.

The LIFE AND LETTERS of Marie Eustelle
Harpain (surnamed the Angel of the Blessed
Sacrament.)

These are only a few out of the many most excellent spiritual books which might be recommended: but we must limit ourselves. Besides, I intend to make it a point, henceforth, as we proceed, whenever occasion offers, of giving a sufficient indication of the useful literature on the precise subject under consideration. I say the useful literature, not the so-called bibliography of the subject, because I have found, to my intense disgust, how misleading are those indiscriminate lists of books and essays of all the authors great and small, competent or incompetent, good, bad or indifferent who happen to

have touched on the subject. We shall have none of this here; we are bent upon spreading light, not darkness and confusion. The books I shall recommend I know to be good and to the point. Most of them I have read more than once and pen in hand, the better to rip them open and tear the heart out of them, for my own benefit and the instruction of souls confided to my care.

Let no one be frightened at the large programme of holy reading here submitted and in prospect. No one is expected to read all this all at once, or within any given time. It is a programme to select from. Besides, a lifetime is a long time, and it is well to foresee years of drought and famine and to lay up a goodly store of provisions against them. After the seven years of great plenty of the dream of Pharaoh, came the seven years of great scarcity. In the same way, after the ease and consolation of the beginnings of a fervent life, there may set in a season of aridity and helplessness, when it will seem impossible to produce any fruits of discursive or affective prayer, and when even the loving God will appear to have withdrawn Himself from the desolate soul. Then the humble and laborious employment of holy reading and thoughtful consideration will have to be taken up again, and the more a contemplative man is familiar with the Holy Scriptures, the books of the Church, and the works of the Saints, the better will he be able to cope with his own difficulties.

Even the Christian who knows no letters can read a good deal or make an equivalent to it. In

what way? First, by hearing others read for him or discourse to him upon the divine mysteries. Then he has under his eyes (if he will but pay attention to it) the wonderful book of nature; and in his hands, this other wonderful abridgment of all God's works, the Holy Crucifix. Some persons are indeed none the worse, in regard to the spiritual life, for not knowing letters: I have had proofs of this many a time. I will relate here one particular instance which came under my direct observation some years ago.

I was doing duty as chaplain for a time in a community of French nuns. In confession I imposed on one of them, as a penance, the recitation of the Litanies of the Holy Name of Jesus. To my surprise, the good nun a lay-Sister, begged to be given another penance as she did not know the litanies by heart and could not read, and did not know much more than the Our Father and Hail Mary. Notwithstanding this, she proved to be one of the most experienced persons in the ways of mental prayer I have ever met. Her case interested me; so I put her through a sort of examination and took note of her answers while they were yet fresh in my memory. I found that she was really accustomed to spend the whole day in simple and familiar intercourse with God. Whilst taking care of the cattle, digging in the garden, going to and fro in the service of the household, she was at the same time busy talking to God or hearkening to Him. I asked her what she said. She answered: "I am never tired of repeating: Lord, my God, lo, I am thy handmaid!

O Jesu, I am thy bride, thy little bride, thy little spouse. My God, be ever with me! Be ever all in all to me! My God, cleanse me thoroughly and fill me wholly with thy very Self. When I go up some stairs: My God, make me to climb all the degrees of perfection according to thy holy will!—Down stairs: My God, see to it that I do not go down into sin and then into the abyss of eternal damnation.—When I meet one of the workmen: My God, see to it that he does not lose his soul and become one of the reprobates. 'Then I say as many Our Fathers and Hail Marys as I can, as fervently as I know how, and many ejaculatory prayers. The day is too short for all I should like to say, but I wake up also during the night and begin again forthwith; I find this very sweet."

This good lay-Sister did not seem to suspect that God was doing great things in her soul. I found also that, by a marvellous instinct of humility, she was, in her intercourse with other people, as reserved and reticent about these graces as she had been simple and straightforward in giving an account of them to me as her spiritual Director.

Let us close this chapter with a last advice about holy reading. The spiritual man has to be on his guard against the subtle temptation of making reading an end in itself, for thus it would become an obstacle instead of a help to Divine Contemplation. The danger is not an imaginary one. Who has not met, at some time or other, the voracious reader with whom gulping down book after book has become a passion,

a mania, a necessity, a sort of morbid craving? No sooner has he begun a book than he must go through with it; no sooner has he finished it than he must take up another; and thus, on and on, without pause, and without ever any end. He simply reads for reading's sake: no profit is aimed at and of course none is attained. The man has become a reading-machine. He may eventually become very erudite: he certainly will never be a contemplative.

CHAPTER XXI

OF AFFECTIVE PRAYER AND THE GIFT OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD

AFFECTIVE Prayer, as we have already seen, takes place when the Holy Ghost stays the discourses of the mind and draws to Himself, sweetly and strongly, the affective powers of the Christian soul. Now when this has become a confirmed habit or a state, its distinguishing feature is the gift of the Presence of God.

In order the better to understand this wonderful grace, it will be useful for us to take a rapid survey of the whole workings of the spirit of Prayer in the Christian soul who offers no resistance to the Holy Ghost.

We read in the Book of Proverbs: "*Wisdom hath built herself a house. . . . She hath sent her maids to invite to the tower. . . . Whosoever is a little one, let him come to me. . . . Come, eat my bread . . . forsake childishness, and live, and walk by the ways of prudence.*" (Prov. ix. 1-6.)

Men on earth are the little children of the Father who is in heaven; very little children indeed, when compared with the Blessed Angels and the full-grown Saints of paradise; very little children, and at times very unwise, naughty and disobedient. They play at all sorts of dangerous games: at Kaiserism of one kind or another, at Kultur and Frightfulness and Socialism and

Bolshevism ; dancing on powder-magazines, making love without marriage, marriage without offspring, driving madly about, diving in the deep and flying in the air. They make a noise for a time until all of a sudden they are tripped up by death and are seen no more. Meanwhile they forget the errand upon which they had been sent by God in the present world, that of making their way to the House which Wisdom has built to Herself, to the Tower of Divine Contemplation, pending the time when they would have been admitted to the vision of God face to face.

Alone the fervent Christian (we call him a mystic) is mindful of his condition of a child of God, and of the purpose for which his Heavenly Father has sent him into this world. Though but a little child, he knows that he has divine powers, that is to say supernatural faculties, added to his natural ones, in order to enable him to make his way to the Tower of Divine Contemplation. Added to his natural faculties of Intellect and Free Will, which are as the two feet upon which he can stand erect and walk wherever he will, he has received in Baptism and Confirmation six wings with which to raise himself from the ground and accelerate his pace, three on one side and three on the other, thus : the three infused theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity, and the three most excellent Gifts of the Holy Ghost : Filial Fear of the Lord, Understanding and Wisdom.

Ordinarily the first manifestation of the spirit of prayer in a Christian who has just emerged from a slothful, negligent state of life, is that of

Discursive Prayer. It is easy to understand why. The first need of such a one is that his mind should be enlightened as to the perfect loveliness of God: accordingly the Holy Spirit begins by flooding his mind with vivid lights, which, as it were, automatically start the process of discursive prayer. This has to take place before the fervid acts of affective prayer can be expected.

At this first stage of the journey, the exercise of the presence of God costs an effort or rather a long series of painful efforts. The little child making his first experiments in the art of walking is a very good illustration of what happens to the beginner in his efforts to realize the presence of God and to start forth upon his journey of the mystical life, with Divine Contemplation in its highest degree as its goal.

Look at the little child crawling on all fours. Soon, however, he grows ambitious and wants to stand upright and walk as he sees grown-up people doing all around him. So, he makes a brave attempt and, of course, falls to the ground. After crawling again on all fours a little while, he tries again to raise himself upright and to balance himself on his unsteady short legs and to take a step or two, when he tumbles over again. Nothing daunted he scrambles to his feet yet another time and yet another time tumbles over. And so the whole day long. Next day he will begin again, and so day after day for many months. Finally a time comes when his efforts are crowned with success; nature helping him, and as he has grown stronger every day and more skilled in the use of his

limbs, he has at last acquired proper control of all his movements. There he stands firmly planted on his feet, erect and noble, looking like a little god, moving freely about as the very lord of creation which he is indeed.

Thus it is also with us in the beginning of our conversion, with regard to the habitual practice of the presence of God. Success is the reward of our persevering efforts, coupled of course with the help of divine grace. We have first to drill ourselves into practice. We have to bring under control not only the attention of our mind and our will, but also and primarily our inferior powers: memory, imagination, the exterior senses, the whole nervous system itself. A fine and wholesome discipline, and one which is by and by rewarded with the infused gift of Divine Contemplation.

At first this gift will show itself by the rapid moving of the Christian upon his journey towards the Tower of which we spoke a while ago, built by Divine Wisdom and where She invites all the children of men to come and feast upon the good things she has prepared: the Tower of the Prayer of Quiet, if we must give it its proper name.

At this new stage of the journey it would be wrong to insist upon speaking of discursive and of affective prayer as though they were two separate, widely distant, almost contrary species of intercourse with God. Rather they should be considered as very slightly different manifestations of the same spirit. They are simply *different moods*, and nothing is more natural than the passing from one of these moods into

the other. In a soul which goes to God with great liberty and allows the Holy Ghost to have His own way with her, the acts of one mood constantly alternate with those of the other. Quite simply and almost unconsciously, under the impulse of the Holy Ghost, the contemplative man produces some act or acts of discursive prayer and then forthwith acts of the most tender or burning affections; as at other times he will on the contrary be moved, at first, to pour out fervid acts of love, and then, as he cannot remain a long time at that white heat, because poor human nature, in its present condition, could not stand it, he lapses again quite naturally, into the discursive mood. Thus it is with him, till the time comes when the Holy Ghost sees fit to raise His faithful servant to the Prayer of Quiet.

Therefore, it seems to me that we are justified in likening the discursive and affective moods of Mental Prayer to the two sides of an avenue leading up to the Tower of the Prayer of Quiet, away from the wretched, sordid world of sinful creatures.

As he walks or rather flies over the very broken ground along the avenue, now leaning more on the side of Discursive Prayer now more on that of Affective Prayer, and getting nearer and nearer to the coveted goal of his journey, the fervent Christian becomes aware of a greater ease and sweetness in the practice of the Presence of God. At last the mood of Affective Prayer becomes decidedly predominant and the feeling of the Presence of God has become a gift. The practice costs him no effort. He has not to force

himself into an attitude, or do violence to his mind ; to be repeating to himself : I am in the Divine Presence. He feels himself there and the feeling is infused from God. He holds himself in the divine presence, simply, sweetly and joyfully. He disports himself in the divine presence with the abandon of a child say of five or six years, in the presence of his mother. Does the little fellow work his brain fearfully and violently to maintain his attention to her presence? He need not do that, because it comes quite natural to him.

See him for instance, with his mother on the sea-shore. He may be very busy looking out for shells, digging holes in the sand and picking up curious sea-weeds. Then, perhaps, he wants to pull off his shoes and stockings and paddle in the surf. He is quite engrossed with all this, and yet, does he forget his mother? does he not turn to her for approval of all he does ; and quite naturally, without having to force himself into an attitude? He only, from time to time, looks up to her and shouts a few joyful words, and returns to his childish play. But he is all along, even when not actually engaged with her, conscious of her presence. He will not go far away from her, or stay long out of her sight. Now and then he comes back and nestles close to her, wistfully looking up in her eyes, and gives her a hearty kiss and receives a shower of loving caresses.

The contemplative about to enter into the castle of Prayer of Quiet has become a little child again, and God is to him a true mother full of the tenderest love. He holds himself

in the divine presence sweetly, joyfully and lovingly. Love does it all. Give me a man who really loves God and he will soon arrive at this point. Love does it all: see there the predominance at last of the affective mood. The little child loves his mother: that is his secret, his talisman: that is why he experiences no difficulty in basking in the sunshine of her presence. To lose sight of her and do without her would be the real difficulty with him, the real hardship. And so also with the advanced contemplative, with regard to the presence of God. On the other hand it need hardly be said that this holding himself perpetually in the presence of God is done by him without ostentation or singularity. He hides his secret as much as he possibly can, though it will betray itself in spite of all his efforts.

We may well understand that when the gift of the presence of God is granted to the Christian, the mood of affective prayer should prevail. *God is love!* Then also, think how with a human lover the presence of the object of his love is wont to throw him into raptures!

But what do these two lovers, God and the fervent Christian, say to one another?

They say but one word, this namely: "Love!" but oh! the accent with which they say it, and the meaning they can impart to it!

They say it, not with any articulate speech, nor with any sound of voice, but with an all-consuming contact of one another.

If I were to translate it in our halting, coarse, human language, I should express it thus:

God is the first to speak. He says:

“Fear not, dear child of my heart: it is I. I am He Whom thou seekest. Peace be with thee!” and in saying this God establishes that soul in great peace.

He speaks again: “Dear child of my heart, take heed, understand: I am love! I am love in three divine Persons! I, the Father, am love abysmal; I, the Son, am love resplendent and made man; I, the Holy Ghost, am love diffusive, and I abide in thee!”

A third time, God says with infinite tenderness:

“I love thee, little one! I want thee. Give me thy heart; I shall first make it very pure, very holy, and then I shall fill it with what it can hold of my own happiness, I shall fill it with my very self. Let me be thy All in all. You to Me, and I to thee: the one to the One!”

Wounded to the heart, pierced through and through, the contemplative can only sigh and sob out:

“My God! my dear God! my Love! my All! I believe in Thee, Love! I hope in Thee, Love! I love Thee who lovest me so! I love Thy love!”

The repetition of this one word LOVE a million times, is not monotonous. It has always a new charm to him.

Let us state the case boldly. If Jesus is Love made man, the mystic who is arrived at this stage of Divine Contemplation is man made love. He is one who from a clod of earth and a sinner, has been by the touch of the grace of God turned into a burning seraph. Seraph

means flame, devouring fire. The highest angels are all ablaze with divine love ; and so is also the fervent Christian on earth, when he is brought up by the Holy Spirit, in front of the House and Tower of perfect Divine Contemplation which Wisdom Herself built and which is no other than the Mental Prayer of Quiet.

Let this stand as some poor description of the state of Affective Prayer.

And now it seems to me as though I heard the loving Lord telling his poor servant *who is but dust and ashes* (Gen. xviii, 27): *Gird up thy loins like a man.* (Job xxxviii, 3.) *Thou hast yet a great way to go* (3 Kings xix, 7). On with the work. Tell souls of good will something of the wonders of my love. *He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.* (Matt. xi, 15.)

CHAPTER XXII

ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE UNITIVE WAY

AT the end of the Illuminative Way in the spiritual life of a fervent soul, there is already, as we have noticed in the foregoing chapter, the gift of the Presence of God and a marked prevalence of the affective mood of prayer. The entrance into the House of Prayer of Quiet marks the beginning of the *Unitive Way*.

In Psalm xxvi, 4, we read: *One thing I have asked of the Lord, this will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, that I may see the delight of the Lord and may visit his temple.*

Dwelling in the house of the Lord all the days of one's life is nothing else than the attaining to and the persevering in the Prayer of Quiet. To see the delight of the Lord is to feed one's soul upon the delightful mysteries of the Sacred Humanity of Our Lord. *O taste and see that the Lord is sweet*, says the Prophet. (Ps. xxxiii, 9.) Visiting the temple of the Lord here means to be raised occasionally to the ecstatic contemplation of the Divine Essence of the Blessed Trinity.

It has been the most ardent desire of our pious pilgrim to reach this noble House of the Prayer of Quiet, as the goal on earth of his spiritual journey. That he might the more freely come

to it, he has left everything behind, divesting himself of all created attachment. He has strenuously sought after it by an intense and unremitting exercise of his faith, hope and charity, and of the three gifts of the Fear of the Lord, Understanding and Wisdom in discursive and affective prayer. Bearing in mind the instruction of Our Lord: *Ask and it shall be given you; seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened to you* (Matt. vii, 7), he has persevered petitioning for this favour and pressing onward in his quest; and now at last, he sights from afar the noble, majestic mansion.

Usually, this stage, the Unitive Way, is reached only late in life; but it is to be aimed at from the very beginning by every one, the more so that no one can promise himself a long life. To him who is destined to die early, Our Lord will not fail to give exceptional graces, if he will only receive them, so that it may come true of him also as has been said: *Being made perfect in a short space, he fulfilled a long time.* (Wisd. iv, 13.) Such has been the case with, for instance, St. Agnes, Blessed Joan of Arc, St. Stanislaus Kostka, the "Little Flower of Jesus," Gemma Galgani: those lovely youthful patterns of Christian perfection.

The Unitive Way should be reached at least by all Christians who pass the meridian of life. The experience they have gained of the vanity of all things here below, the habit of prayer they must have developed, the cumulative effects of the Sacraments, as well of those which are received but once, as of those which may be

received hundreds and thousands of times ; the providential snapping of the bonds of human friendship and love, by the deaths of their dear ones, as they proceed onwards on their pilgrimage, and finally the flagging of their own energies for active life : all these things ought to concur at last to fit them for the Unitive Way. If they are stripped bare, figuratively speaking, it is in order that they might go naked to God and adhere to Him, giving themselves up entirely to a life of prayer. Such is really the case with the old people in intensely Catholic countries, as Brittany, Ireland, Spain, etc.

It is not my intention to follow our contemporary writers on Prayer, in their scientific analysis of the diverse states or degrees of contemplation : nothing seems to me more useless or misleading ; but I aim at giving such a summary description of these as will kindle in the soul of good will a desire to know them by personal experience.

On account of the strangeness of the divine happenings we are attempting to describe, we are in the necessity of making a liberal use of parables, metaphors and images vivid and varied. The Holy Scriptures stand as our model and our justification in this. See the lavish use our Blessed Lord makes of parables in His Gospel of love, and to what good purpose. See the mixed metaphors he accumulates in that celebrated page in Matt. xiii, 24-52, where He gives us a forecast of the history of His Church. He calls it a Kingdom : *The Kingdom of Heaven on earth*, and compares that Kingdom *to a sower whose seed fell partly by the wayside, partly*

upon stony ground, partly among thorns and the rest on good ground ;—to a field in which the husbandman sowed good seed and the enemy, by stealth, overnight, sowed cockle ;—to a grain of mustard-seed which is very small, but grows up and becomes a mighty tree ; to leaven which a woman hid in three measures of meal until the whole was leavened ; to a treasure hidden in a field ; to a merchant in search of precious pearls ; to a net cast into the sea and gathering in all kinds of fishes.

We have another strong example of mixed metaphors from our Blessed Lord, when He informs us that *we are His sheep and that He is the Good Shepherd, and at the same time the Fold, the Door of the Fold and the very Pasture.* (John x.) What in the mouth of a mere mortal man would be an abuse of human language verging on extravagance is here the expression of an absolute truth and the only way of conveying somehow fully, if piecemeal, the mystery of all that Jesus is to us.

It is Our Lord also, prophetically, Who with the pen of Solomon, describes in the Cantic of Canticles the reciprocal love that exists between Himself and His Church, and again between Himself and every individual Christian soul.

What shall we say of the wonderful imagery of the Prophets Ezechiel and Daniel, or of the spiritual or symbolical meanings which the Fathers of the Church discover all over the Old Testament? It is true that these mystical interpretations hardly appeal to our modern mentality; but it must be owned also that modern

mentality is not the measure of all things—least of all, of the divine mysteries.

In his treatise, “*De Divinis Nominibus*,” and in his epistle to Titus, the Pseudo-Areopagite speaks of the Scripture-metaphors as of so many fictions which are at the same time bold and reverential, palpably representative of things hidden from the senses, divisible symbols of things without parts; such, in one word, that if a man will but penetrate into their hidden beauty, he will find them overflowing with mysterious, divine, theological light. He goes on to say that “the veil is lifted only in favour of the true lovers of holy things, because they are sure not to interpret in a puerile way these pious symbols. Thanks to the purity of their mind and the power of penetration of their contemplative faculty they are enabled to discern the truth in its intimate simplicity under its supernatural depth, which so excellently transcends any coarse material image.” (Dionysius, Ep. ix, 1.)

Before we venture inside the House of Quiet, there is one thing for us to do.

When Moses was feeding the sheep of the priest of Madian, one day he drove his flock to the inner part of the desert, *and came to the mountain of God, Horeb. The Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush, and he saw that the bush was on fire and was not burnt; and Moses said, “I will go and see that great sight. When the Lord saw that he went forward to see, he called to him out of the midst of the bush and said: Come not nigh hither; put off the shoes from thy feet, for the*

place whereon thou standest is holy ground. (Exod. iii.) O my reader, the ground on which we now venture is so holy that even angels might well tremble to tread it: let us then, put off our shoes from our feet; I mean, let us agree that before we take one more step forward in this matter of the Prayer of Quiet, we do here and now divest ourselves of all purely human curiosity: the better to understand these things of God which now lie before us, we put off all inordinate affections to created things. We want to gaze upon all that will be shown us in the House of the Lord, with the clean and bright eyes of the soul; we want to understand all that is going to be related to us, in a purely spiritual, not carnal, sense.

CHAPTER XXIII

INSIDE THE HOUSE OF QUIET

HE that has come so far in his spiritual life as to catch a distant and yet distinct view of the House or Citadel which Wisdom built herself, is already a Knight. Whether man or woman (for spiritual life knows not the distinction of sexes), he has won his spurs. In many a hard-fought battle against the world and the devil and still more against self, he has distinguished himself in the sight of God and his blessed Angels. He has no sooner caught sight of the severe and imposing structure in the distance, than he quickens his pace and stretches forward and will give himself no rest until he has come up quite closely to it.

But here a sore disappointment awaits his eager soul. Where there should be a door there is no door, only two marvellously sculptured figures of heroic size half set in the wall, at a height of three feet from the ground: the one on the right representing the Blessed Virgin Mary, that on the left, the Key-bearer of heaven, St. Peter. He then makes a tour all round the huge building, scanning the walls to discover some aperture; there is none; no door, no window.

Twice he made this journey, only to become absolutely sure there was no entrance of any kind anywhere. What was he to do? Clearly

it was out of his power altogether to effect his entrance into the so much coveted place. He could not even knock at the door, since there was none. And yet Our Lord has said: *Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you.* (Matt. viii, 7.) All he could do was to knock by his loud prayer, and he did pray, if not with a loud voice, for the solemn silence of the place impressed him, at least with a loud clamour of his whole soul. At last, wearied as well as exhausted by the previous fatigue of the journey he fell asleep, there at the feet of the Virgin: a deep, refreshing sleep, and he had a vision as Jacob on his way to Haran, of the golden ladder that goes up from earth to heaven, on which angels go continually up and down and at the top there is God, the loving God, looking down with a benign face, and saying words of blessing and encouragement.

When he awoke, what was his surprise to find himself inside the House. It took him some time to realize this. He could hardly believe his own eyes, for he found himself at one end of an immense hall; at the foot of a huge cross, with a monumental fountain of many-coloured marble in front of it, and on turning his head towards the wall against which the huge cross was reared, he discovered a great fresco painting which at once riveted his attention. On the left side of the cross was represented a strange flock of lions, tigers, panthers and other fierce animals, who yet allowed themselves to be driven with menacing gesture and clamour by a chubby little boy, seemingly to-

wards the pool of water in the lowest basin of the fountain. It appeared as if the waters had the virtue of bringing about a wonderful transformation, for on the right side of the cross he saw the same chubby little boy, looking very sweet now, clapping his little hands in childish glee, his flock of cruel, wild beasts all turned into so many lambs innocently frisking around him, whilst doves fluttered over his head and shoulders.

At this our Knight could not contain his joy ; he ran up to the wall and kissed the child saying, "Thou art Jesus, art Thou not? I have known Thee all my life. Oh! how I love Thee!" And Jesus seemed glad of the caress and without sound of words He spoke to the heart of His friend, telling him to go and refresh himself at the fountain, to drink of the seven basins and then look well at the place He had prepared for him, and return and recount his impression.

Here then, at last, was the House of the Prayer of Quiet, and this is how it appeared to him. At first he was simply dazed by the splendour of it: it struck him with speechless amazement. All he could do was to roam in it aimlessly, and pause and gaze at the walls from end to end and from top to bottom, and at the marvellous mosaic pavement, and at the open sky overhead, for there was no ceiling: but this last feature was hardly noticed by him at first: he had too many other things at which to wonder.

When he came back after his first ramble, he kissed the child again and said: "Jesus, I love

'Thy House, *our house* I should say: but I do not understand it yet. All I can make out thus far is that I am to be here the happy prisoner of Thy love, as long as I live or as long as I like. Then it will be as long as I live: *This is my rest for ever and for ever; here will I dwell for I have chosen it.* (Ps. cxxxix, 14). *This is no other but the house of God and the gate of heaven.* (Gen. xxviii, 17.) *It is good for us to be here.* (Matt. xvii, 4.)"

"But, my dear," says the child, secretly into our Knight's heart; "look at yourself, how thinly clad you are: you will have to abide here day and night and in all seasons, without any protection; besides, you will have no companions; only Me; and I shall not always speak into your heart, at least audibly; and you will have to undergo here some terrible, mysterious trials, I will not say what nor how long."

"Thou speakest darkly, Jesus, my Brother and my Lover, answered the Knight: but whatever may betide me in this Thy House, never on any consideration shall I want to leave it, if only I am permitted to love Thee. O my dearest, O my darling God! Thou sayest I shall have no other companion than Thy sweet Self! All the better, for another companion would take away some of my attention from Thee and perhaps a part of my affections.

"As for my appearance, I had not noticed any change in me thus far: but I see now there is. I am almost naked. I suppose this is the way in which St. John the Baptist was clad in the desert; or perhaps the way Adam and Eve were clad by Our Heavenly Father with

the hide of beasts before He drove them out of the earthly Paradise. It is very light and does not interfere with my freedom of movement, and I like it!"

We must now attempt a description of the inside of the House of Quiet. Represent to yourself an immense lofty hall, the lines of which are so harmonious that you do not at first realize the vastness of its proportions: something in the style of a Roman basilica, St. Paul outside the walls for instance, but without pillars, altars or furniture of any kind, and without windows or chandeliers or contrivance of any kind for the purpose of giving light. All the light streams, not from the open sky, but from the great crucifix at the east end of the hall, and the contemplative understands now that even the light of the sun by day and that of the stars by night is borrowed from the dying figure of the Saviour of the world. He said: *I am the Light of the world.* (John viii, 12.) Indeed He is, and in more senses than the obviously supernatural one, if only men could be made to see it. Even for all the gifts of nature we are beholden to Jesus Crucified.

To the beholder who stands at the west end of the great hall, with his back turned to the wall, the vista that stretches out before him is at once simple and rich in the extreme. The walls on the right and on the left are covered at their base with a course of lofty, dark oak panels elaborately sculptured and surmounted by a course of magnificent embroidered tapestry. Above this again there is an expanse of brightly coloured fresco-paintings; and crowning the

whole, at a dizzy height, a gallery of three hundred and sixty statues of Saints, which must be of extraordinary size, for they appear, even at that lofty position, as though they were life-size and ready to move or to speak ; the same is true of all the personages in the paintings or tapestries or wood panels ; at whatever height they be, they appear life-size and alive, and they speak into the very heart of the beholder.

Most marvellous of all are the scenes embroidered on the tapestries. These are all taken from the mysteries of the life and death and resurrection and glory of Our Blessed Lord. Those on the south wall, from its west end till it reaches the great crucifix, represent the earthly life of Our Lord till his death on the Cross ; those on the north wall beginning near the great crucifix and returning to the west wall are the glorious mysteries. There are twenty-five scenes on the south wall and as many on the northern one : a glorious, uninterrupted series of all the mysteries of Jesus in their proper order, from His Incarnation till His last coming to judge the living and the dead, and His Nuptials with His Heavenly Bride, the Church of all the Blessed. There is no mistaking the purpose of these scenes nor escaping their effect : the aim kept in view is to draw out one Person, just one, to impress His figure in the mind, in the heart, in the imagination, in the sensibility of the beholder ! Turn where you will, there you meet Him, oh ! so lovely ! so beautiful ! so majestic ! so sweet ! Not only is He the central figure in each scene, but all the other personages are so well subordinated to Him that they seem

to borrow all they have from Him alone and completely to melt into His radiance, the result being a still more forcible impression of Him made on the contemplative mind and heart.

Over every one of these scenes from the life and mysteries of Our Lord, is a corresponding scene from the life of His Church (we might even say, of His life in the Church) on earth, in the fresco-paintings: whilst below, sculptured in the black wood panel is also a corresponding scene of the spiritual life of the individual soul. For instance, above the Last Supper embroidered on the tapestry is a fresco-painting of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass being offered up in the Catacombs, in a Gothic cathedral, in a virgin forest of South America, in an African village, in far away China by a mandarin-priest, in the trenches at the battle front by a soldier-priest. Below the same picture of the Last Supper, in the wood panelling the sculptor has had the skill to represent a great crowd pressing around the Holy Table to receive Communion. There you see little children of six and seven, bright adolescents of both sexes making their solemn Communion in what used to be the apparel of First Communicants, young people of all ranks and professions, newly married couples in their bridal dress, soldiers, sailors, officers of the army and navy, men wearing the badge of the air-force, fathers and mothers of families, old people feeble and decrepit, and in a corner a dying Christian on his pallet, transfigured in the joy of receiving Holy Viaticum from the hands of a youthful priest.

Thus, if you look at the pictures as they are

superimposed one over the other, you find that the central one (which is a scene of our Lord's life) gives its significance to the one above it and to the one below it. Thus also, if instead of considering these as they are disposed one over the other, you look at their succession along the walls, you perceive that you have in the fresco-paintings the whole history of the Church past, present and future, viewed in the light of the mysteries of Our Lord ; and also parallel with these two upper series of paintings, but under them, you have in the sculptured oak panels the whole history of the spiritual life of a fervent Christian, equally interpreted in the light of the mysteries of Our Lord ; and it is to be noted that as the history of the Christian proceeds, his resemblance to his divine model becomes more marked in the painting as it is also in real life.

Superimposed columns, half emerging from the wall, gradually diminishing in size, divide off the twenty-five sections or sets of pictures on each side, and with the ornamental transverse courses of sculptured stone running in three parallel lines all along the walls, form a suitable framing to each scene.

They serve at the same time the purpose of breaking the monotony of such immense walls. The capitals of these half columns support a running corbel which forms a sort of dais or canopy over the heads of the Saints of the gallery, by groups of seven, one for each day of the week.

Besides these columns half emerging from the thickness of the wall, and of common white

stone, there stands in each corner of the building and half way along the north and south wall six huge monoliths of most rare marble, and a seventh one dividing off the west wall into halves. In the right-hand half are depicted in a vivid manner the horrible torments of the damned in Hell ; and in the other the sufferings of the poor souls in Purgatory.

These monoliths are the seven columns hewn out by Divine Wisdom, each bearing the name of one of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. The central column of the west wall is called **THE FEAR OF THE LORD**. The two in each corner of the same wall are **PIETY** and **SCIENCE**, the two at the other end of the hall are **COUNSEL** and **FORTITUDE**, and the two half way up the hall are **WISDOM** and **UNDERSTANDING**. The four columns in the corners, corresponding to the gifts which are devoted to heroic saintly action, namely **PIETY** and **SCIENCE**, **COUNSEL** and **FORTITUDE**, support at each end of the hall a large Roman arch of a magnificent amplitude, with the sweep of a rainbow in the sky. The other three, **Fear of the Lord**, **Wisdom** and **Understanding**, as they are for pure Contemplation have no superincumbent weight. Over their capital there is a sphere, and on the sphere is perched an emblematic bird: on the **Fear of the Lord** a cock flapping its wings as though in the act of crowing ; an eagle with outstretched wings on **Understanding** ; and a brooding dove on **Wisdom**.

It is time our attention was directed to the marvellous mosaic pavement. It spreads out under the feet of our Knight like a carpet of

green grass enamelled with all sorts of flowers and insects and birds and beasts, to show us the childlike delight with which a true contemplative looks upon the lovely face of nature, and watches all its moods—the more so that it helps him to raise his mind and heart to the loving God. The immense majority of men, shut up in their wretched towns, or stupidly inattentive, miss a good deal of the purest joy of life through the want of this childlike simplicity; *Theirs is the kingdom of heaven* says Our Lord, of the little ones and of those who resemble them; and not only the kingdom of heaven, but in addition, also the kingdom of nature. By a last stroke of genius the maker of this pavement has contrived to give by small instalments, cleverly distributed here and there among the flowers, the whole miraculous history of the Old Testament, so rich in dogmatic or spiritual or symbolical lessons, from the Six Days of Creation to the apparition of the Angel to Zacharias the father of the Precursor, whilst he was offering the evening sacrifice in the Temple.

At the foot of the large cross and at some distance below the body of the Crucified Saviour, the marble fountain sends out its crystal waters from under the raised foot of a lamb. These waters do not rise up in the air to descend with a splash: they only bubble forth and run over the margin, falling from basin into basin seven times with a murmurous sound as of a thousand softly-whispered prayers, and swiftly disappear in underground channels to carry refreshment and fecundity to the ends of the world. This refreshing movement of the waters is the only

sound heard in this hall, except when, from time to time, flights of invisible angels seem to sweep through the hall: for then, snatches of heavenly music are audible as of thousands and hundreds of thousands of voices softened by infinite distance.

A princely row of eleven majestic Apostles, St. Peter being in the middle, is seen above the top of the Cross, and as this east wall is finished in a semi-circle spanned by a Roman arch, a most gorgeous mosaic fills this space with the figures of God the Father and God the Son side by side on the high throne of heaven, in flowing robes sweeping far down over the seven steps of the throne. The two are lovingly facing each other and the Holy Ghost is between them as a dove with out-stretched wings, so that one wing touches the breast of the Father and the other the wound in the side of the Son. At the right hand of Jesus stands, in sweetly majestic attitude, the lovely Queen of Paradise, invested with the glory that radiates from her divine Son. All sorts of precious stones are set in her diadem and over her mantle. Again on the right of Mary stands St. Joseph, then St. John the Baptist. On the left of the eternal Father stand the three archangels, Michael, Gabriel and Raphael. Flights of lesser angels and innumerable winged-headed Cherubs all around in a receding vista in the back-ground create an impression as though there were millions of them.

Such then, symbolically, is our House of the Lord, the House of the Prayer of Quiet. Least of all is it a house of Quietism: for everything

in it is calculated to provoke and stimulate both the mind and the heart of the dweller therein, to very intense, though very quiet action. Except at those precious moments, rare and rapidly passing away, when God himself takes the Contemplative in hand, here in the midst of this marvellous display on walls and pavements, it is simply impossible to do otherwise than think and love and pray and adore. The faculty of discursive and affective prayer is not lost nor torpid: it is silenced only in the actual moments of passive or semi-passive contemplation, which, according to the testimony of St. Teresa, hardly ever lasts so much as a half hour at a time.

Jesus is All in All in this house; He is everywhere; He is everything: He and He alone. Is, then, the contemplative who has arrived at the Prayer of Quiet, alienated from his brethren, separated from the rest of the Church? Far from it. He is even more united with them, more devoted to the Church, more useful in every way than he ever was before. How is that? It is through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. Our Lord in becoming his All in All has made Himself the bond of union of this Christian with his brethren, even as He is the bond of union of this same Christian with His Heavenly Father. So it has always been with all the Saints, even with those who buried themselves alive in the depth of the deserts.

Do you now ask who has been the architect, who the painter of the House? Who conceived the idea of this hall and reared it and adorned it? It is the very same who introduced

our Knight into it: Love, Love eternal, Love essential and supersubstantial, Love Triune: God, God Himself and alone, the loving God.

And do you say with impetuous enthusiasm: Oh! I also want to come to this House of the Lord and live in it till the end of my days on earth? Well said, my brother! well said! this is the way to speak. But mind, you must not try to come in but through the avenue and with the wings we have described in Chapter XXI, you must pay the price in utter self-surrender; further you must be ready to undergo in that very House of the Lord the most severe trials. Love reigns supreme here, but Love is a terribly exacting Master to us poor mortals; in fact he is a tyrant. He wants to change the clay and base metals of our present composition into the gold and precious stones that will make us fit for the Heavenly Jerusalem. The process of such a transformation implies some violence. Of this we shall speak presently.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE PASSIVE NON-MIRACULOUS STATES OF PRAYER

IN crossing the threshold of the Unitive Life, we have reached such communings with God as are properly those of the Perfect.

The divers species of divine contemplation which precede this stage are no doubt very wonderful effects of the grace of God, and very sweet in themselves, but they cannot be compared with the Prayer of Quiet. They are of an inferior quality ; they bear to it the relation of means to end, designed to bring the soul up gradually to the Prayer of Quiet, and yet incapable of introducing her into it. That must be God's doing exclusively, and it is the most perfect contemplation that can be vouchsafed to man here below.

By being introduced into the House of Quiet, has the soul come to the end of her labours? Is she going to do no more than simply sit down and enjoy God and herself in God? Far from this being the case, it seems as though it is now only that she begins really to work, and dare, and do wonders, to labour and spend and be spent and consume herself, never resting, never ceasing, never saying "It is enough." All that the Christian has done hitherto looks like child's play compared with what is in store for him.

Here human language conspicuously fails us.

Whoever tries to express these higher realities is betrayed into using the words Quiet, Quietude, Passive states, Passive Contemplation and the like, when really he speaks of a stage of the spiritual life of the most intense and consuming activity, because, forsooth, there is not found in it that outward show and bustle and noise which men call activity. Let us be content then, to use these words, being careful, however, not to allow ourselves to be deceived as to their real import.

The Contemplation of the Perfect is distinguished from that of the Beginner and the Pilgrim by the following characteristics: (1) Simplification of the Soul; (2) Continuousness of her Prayer; (3) Passive Purifications; (4) Passive Illuminations; (5) Passive Unions; (6) Divine Fruitfulness.

(1) First, then, we must note the utter simplification of the soul's outlook on the world and on all things. She does not desire to look at anything but God, and she sees Him by one simple gaze. She tastes the mysteries of Jesus as a marvellous draught, which a man should drink without stopping to analyse the divers elements of its sweetness. Her neighbour she sees only in God. To her, every man, woman and child, is Jesus, either in reality or in potentiality: Jesus by proxy. Little children are so many replicas of the Child Jesus. It is not So-and-So, a sympathetic person, or the reverse: it is Jesus living in His mystical member. If the man be an enemy to Jesus, then the mystic sees but this fact, and any other feature vanishes from before his eyes. He will oppose the man

in as much as he is an enemy to Jesus ; he will sorrow about such a horrible and dangerous state of affairs, he will pray for him, and do all he can to wrench him from the grip of the devil and win him over to Jesus. As for his own self, he sees it also in God : and there he values himself highly : but how he does hate his own sinfulness and imperfections, past and present, seen in the white and scorching light of His infinite sanctity ! In a word God is for him all in all. God limits his entire horizon and fills the sphere of the universe wholly with His divine splendour, giving to every object its proper subordinate place, its meaning, its colour, and superseding or transcending everything infinitely.

(2) Mental prayer is now a state, a gift, a permanent endowment. It is practically uninterrupted ; it comes as naturally to the soul as breathing to the body, and it is almost as little noticed by her. Spontaneously and constantly, the soul breaks into acts of Faith, Hope and Charity ; whilst the Holy Ghost gives her still a higher impulse by means of the gifts which regulate man's immediate dealings with God—the Fear of the Lord, Understanding and Wisdom. It is the gift of the Fear of the Lord which comes prominently into play in the Passive Purifications of which we shall speak presently ; whilst the gift of Understanding presides over the Passive illuminations, and the gift of Wisdom over the passive states of ecstatic Union.

(3) Passive Purifications.—Up to now the fervent Christian has taken himself in hand,

strenuously working at his own correction from sins and imperfections ; now, it is God Himself who takes him in hand and will do for him what he himself never could achieve : silence his faculties one by one, strip away his natural activities, divest him of the subtle and elusive forms of self-love, reach down to the very centre of his being, to the division of the soul and the spirit, to the very marrow (so to say) of his faculties, in order to eradicate the most secret roots of former sin. This done, God plunges the mystic into the abyss of his own native nothingness and impotence, rolls him over and over in it, makes him go through periods of doubts, scruples, darkness, aridity, temptations of the flesh, of blasphemy, of despair. Sometimes the persecutions of men or excruciating infirmities of the body or both at the same time are added over and above measure. This is really terrible. This soul who loves God so vehemently sees herself on the very brink of hell. She is in a black hole ; she is stifled and cannot so much as cry out for help. It seems that heaven is deaf to her prayers, and that God has abandoned her. The darkness that settles round her is so thick that she cannot see her Crucified Saviour, or any of His mysteries, or any work of His goodness in the world of nature. She comes to persuade herself that she is no longer in the House of the Prayer of Quiet. She blames herself for having, as she thinks, deserved to be expelled from it : and yet, though she cannot perceive this, she is praying as she never did before, and her prayer is vastly more meritorious than when she was en-

joying all the beauties of the place, and the consolations of sensible devotion. She holds on to God by the apex of her will, and Our Lord is invisibly, most tenderly, most firmly, supporting her.

The Blessed Joan of Arc in her donjon, St. Francis of Sales in his youth at Bologna, St. Alphonsus de' Liguori in his old age, Cardinal Vaughan towards the end of his life, are examples of these passive purifications of a perfect soul. There are also great historical examples in the Old Testament, such as those of Tobias the Elder, David when he composed his sublime penitential Psalms, and holy Job, as we see by his soul-stirring lamentations on the miseries of man, and on his own terrible afflictions.

To their amazement, persons who have the privilege closely to observe her will discover that a generous soul thus in treatment at the hands of the loving God is at bottom perfectly indifferent to either consolations or pain. She has but one wish: to do God's holy will. She may in the greatness of her sufferings utter a cry of pain, but never the least complaint, never so much as a secret wish to see her severe trial come to an end. O how thoroughly has Our Lord killed self-love in His servant! To Him the glory!

On the other hand, when the darkness has passed, and the servant of God finds himself in the midst of consolation; when the Holy Ghost makes him yearn with unutterable tenderness *to die and be with Christ*, even then—if you press the question whether he would not con-

sent to abide here below—you find that even in this regard of going to heaven, he has no will of his own; he is content to stay where he is as long as it may be the pleasure of his Lord, his only love. He has in very deed learnt the lesson of self-abnegation perfectly: there is in him not a shadow of secret self-seeking in the things of God.

(4) This stage of the spiritual life is marked by passive illumination of the soul through the vision of God in the Dark Cloud. Until now the Christian has been working with might and main at his own enlightenment, by reading the word of God, by hearing it preached, and by making his own reflections upon it, thus building up for himself the edifice of his knowledge of the supernatural as well as of the natural truths. This is a very gratifying exercise of his natural faculties upon the subject-matter of divine revelation. But at this stage it happens that God reduces the natural faculties of the contemplative to silence and blindness. God introduces the naked soul into a region without language, without image, without a glimmer of created light. He seems to take away also all the soul's previous knowledge, reducing her to a marvellous ignorance: the whole world of creatures, past or present, and all her experiences of them, past or present, seem to fall away from her as a worn garment. God is emptying the vessel of the soul, and wiping it perfectly dry, and mysteriously pouring Himself into it by a new kind of presence, to be thus the sole object of her contemplation, in His own divine essence, in absolute simplicity.

But the light of God in Himself is too intense to be received by the bat-like eyes of a soul still a wayfarer: it dazzles her by its very radiance: all she perceives is a dark, luminous cloud. But she knows it to be the very object of her love: in contemplating it rapturously she receives greater illuminations than she ever did from the volume of Nature, from the pages of Holy Writ, from the paintings on the walls of the House of Prayer; only she cannot put her new knowledge into words, nor can she long sustain gazing upon this luminous dark cloud. But, oh! during these brief ecstatic moments, how profound is the impression that she receives!

When the trance is over, the faithful lover of God has perforce to fall back upon his former, less sublime way of dealing with the divine mysteries. He must resort again to discursive prayer, meditation and holy reading. Such a recoil, though a relief to weak human nature, is extremely painful to the soul. It costs her an effort to adjust herself again to this comparatively lower plane of life. She cannot help behaving as does the little infant whom its mother takes away from the breast, and who, by tears and cries, protests vehemently that there, in that lovely maternal bosom, is all he desires.

I take it that nothing can give a better approximate idea of the nature of the sufferings of the holy souls in Purgatory, and of their absolute surrender and loving patience under the heavy hand of God, as also of their contemplation and gradual enlightenment, than the passive purification and passive illumination of

the Christian at this stage of the spiritual life.

(5) Further, the way of the Perfect is marked by a species of passive union with God to which nothing else she had hitherto experienced can be likened. Up to this point the Christian has worked at procuring his own union with God. He has effected it by the worthy reception of the Sacraments and by producing, with the help of grace, fervid acts of Faith, Hope and Charity. All this was good in so far as it went, only it did not reach the point of effectiveness willed for him by the loving God. So it is left to God Himself to take this soul into His own hands, so to say, and perform the act of uniting her still more closely to His own Divine Goodness. It will be God's own doing. All that is required of the soul is that she should lie passive and unresisting; gently, lovingly, acquiescing in all that God does with her and in her; co-operating as best she may in this—God's—action.

There is then effected such a union of the soul with God, such an absorption of her in Him, that, for the time being, she seems irretrievably lost to the world of sense and the company of created things. It is as though she had temporarily lost her identity, and become one with God. Represent to yourself a shepherd's cabin, abandoned, wide open, on a river bank, and overtaken by a mighty flood. As the cabin does not adhere to the ground because it is on wheels, and offers no resistance, it is soon lifted from its place and carried away by the rushing waters. It becomes, so to say, the prey of the mighty flood, wholly passive in its

embrace, absolutely at its mercy, one with it. So it is with the soul of the Perfect, in the overwhelming embrace of the Divine Essence, at certain ecstatic moments of passive union. But whilst the adventure of the shepherd's cabin will soon end in total wreckage and annihilation, the Christian soul comes out of this divine adventure amazingly strengthened in all her faculties. It is as though from being previously compounded of base metals, it found itself suddenly turned into gold.

When the Pseudo-Areopagite tells us that his master the holy man Hierotheus, experienced in himself divine phenomena—*divina patiebatur*—he means that these spells of passive purification, passive illumination and passive union were manifestly taking place in him.

CHAPTER XXV

MARVELLOUS FRUITFULNESS OF THE PERFECT SOUL

IN the depth of her quietude, the soul of the dweller in the House of Prayer is intensely active and extraordinary fruitful. In this she shows herself the true child of the Heavenly Father.

What is there so supremely and transcendently quiet as the Divine Essence, and what is there whose operation is (to speak in a human way) so protracted, so intense in itself, so wonderful in its results? Within Himself, the intensity of the life of God produces the Eternal Generation of the Divine Word and the Eternal Procession of the Holy Spirit. Outside of Himself God sends forth His Divine Word and His Holy Spirit, and the universe of things visible and invisible is created out of nothing, held in continued existence, and governed with infinite wisdom ; angelic natures are proved, sifted, and assigned each to his proper place and treatment according to his desert ; man is created, and at first established in a state of supernatural innocence and happiness foreshadowing the state of glory promised him as the reward of his remaining faithful. When the sin of Adam and Eve would have encompassed the ruin of the whole race, God promises, and in due time sends, His Divine Son to become man and achieve the salva-

tion of the world. Then follow in wonderful sequence the mysteries of the Incarnation, the Redemption, the Church of Christ, the making of the Saints, the gathering of the elect in heaven, until the day of General Resurrection and the Last Judgment. In very deed God is intensely active and most wonderfully fruitful in the midst of His supremely transcending quietude.

As regards the true contemplative, a first harvest of fruits is made up of prayers, attendance at Mass, Holy Communion and all his other acts of religion, to which must be added the merits of all the simple, common, human acts of his life—even the most lowly in character, such as manual labour, recreation, taking of meals, retiring to rest. Thanks to the wonderful purity of intention and the supernatural fervour of love with which he performs all these actions, they are every one of them good works of prime quality. Like ripe, well-flavoured, perfectly wholesome fruit, they are free from the canker of secret self-seeking, which often spoils the value of the good works of tepid souls—free, also, from the exterior blemishes usually found upon fruits of inferior grade.

On this score alone the Christian, who is in the Unitive Way, gives to God great glory, at the same time as he wins for himself an unimaginable store of merits for heaven. Yet this is but the beginning of his gains.

Over and above this fruit harvest, there comes another made up of acts of perfect charity, either springing up straight from the positive acts of religion, and especially from the recep-

tion of the Sacraments, or having no apparent connection with these. An act of perfect charity is one which is performed with all the intensity of love of which the soul is capable, purely and simply for the sake of God, without any regard to self. Such an act is but rarely and with difficulty performed by Beginners or Pilgrims, because of its intrinsic difficulty ; that is to say, in plain language, because of the obstacles they find to its accomplishment in their unmortified or imperfectly mortified selves.

Any single act of perfect charity has for its first effect the cleansing of the soul from all former sins and the cancelling of all her debts to the Divine Justice. It makes her as pure as the freshly baptized babe and as fit as he for the immediate possession of God in the Beatific Vision, should death intervene at that moment. Moreover, it has the virtue of enlarging the capacity of the loving soul so that she receives a larger infusion of the Holy Spirit. Finally, it increases in the soul the inclination and ability for the further performance of similar acts of perfect charity. Thus, whilst the Beginner and Pilgrim plod slowly and painfully along the path of virtue, the Perfect climbs with giant strides the lofty heights of sanctity ; and far from finding weariness and exhaustion in this exercise, the higher he rises the more fit and eager he finds himself to mount still higher. St. Thomas, treating of Charity, assures us that no other virtue possesses so great an inclination to perform its proper acts, or finds in them so much relish. (*2-2æ quæst. 23.2.*)

In multiplying his precious acts of perfect

charity the lover of God is not bent upon piling up for himself treasures of merits in heaven: were he so, it might somewhat lower the standard of his charity; he is bent purely and wholly upon loving his Lord, and that is the very secret of the perfection of his act. All the same, he does obtain this secondary result of producing spiritual wealth beyond all reckoning; and when he adverts to the fact, he is filled with humble joy and gratitude. But so natural to him has become the divine atmosphere of sanctity, in which he moves and has his being, that he achieves many of these acts of perfect charity quite unconsciously, without taking any more notice of them than of his breathing.

We must notice that the commandment of perfect charity is given to all men, whereas it is really fulfilled only by the dwellers of the House of Quiet. Is not this a fresh proof and a very strong one, that all men are called to the fullness of mystical life and to Divine Contemplation at its highest, though but few attain it?

To every one, to me, to you, dear reader, is this absolute and peremptory command given: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind, and with thy whole strength.* (Mark xii, 30.) Now it is evident that the Christian who is in the third stage of the spiritual life—that is to say, the Unitive Way—is the only man who carries out this command to the letter and in its fullness. Devout Christians of an inferior degree make attempts at compliance which are only partly successful. They honestly try to accomplish the law of love in its entirety;

they fall short of it because of their defects, more or less numerous and taking time to remove. Their will is good and is turned in the right direction, and though it does not at present reach far enough, God is satisfied with them for the time being, in consideration of the fact that at some future period, known to Him, they will reach to the perfection of the law of charity —if not during their life, certainly immediately after death.

As for the acts of perfect love of God in the service of one's neighbour, there again the Christian who is in the Unitive Way surpasses all his brethren. His burning prayer of intercession vivifies the whole Church of God. In addition to this it makes him the father of innumerable souls, who will owe to him their triumph over temptation at some critical moment of their life, or perhaps their vocation to the holy priesthood or to the religious life, or their final perseverance and salvation. At his entrance into Paradise he will be shown all this spiritual posterity. Then he will exclaim in glad surprise: "Whence come to me all these children whom I did not even know? The Lord has done great things to me: holy is His name!"

Besides all this, when, being moved thereto by the Holy Ghost, our perfect Contemplative and lover of God turns to works of mercy, spiritual or corporal, he brings into them the spirit and the power of his Divine Master, our Lord. How can he fail to bear much fruit there also? Thus are explained the wonderful achievements of a St. Benedict, a St. Dominic, a St. Francis of Assisi, a St. Ignatius Loyola, a St. Teresa, a St.

Vincent of Paul, and all the other founders of religious Orders. Thus, also, is accounted for the wonderful harvest of souls secured by apostolic men, in the pulpit, in the confessional, by their books, by their correspondence, by their private conversation. How these men of God do indeed edify, enlighten, comfort and save souls!

Taking all this into consideration, it is no wonder that spiritual writers should assure us that one such Christian alone does more good in the world—and, in consequence, is dearer to God—than hundreds of others less fervent; just as one grown-up man will do, single-handed, more profitable work than hundreds of little children put together.

EPILOGUE

We have now reached the end of our task.

In this volume I set out to disentangle the true notion of Divine Contemplation, and it seems to me I have, by the grace of God, somehow accomplished it. It is now for you, dear reader, to turn it to your own advantage.

It will be noticed that in this volume the word "Contemplation" has been used in three different acceptations. First, in its widest meaning—in contradistinction to Saintly Action—Contemplation includes any species of direct intercourse of the fervent Christian with the beloved God. Then, it is taken in the more limited sense of mental prayer of whatsoever kind. Finally, it is used in its strictest meaning, namely, that of a loving but speechless gazing upon the person of our Blessed Lord, or upon the Divine Essence of the Most Holy Trinity. In each case the context will have sufficiently shown the peculiar shade of meaning we then attached to the word.

It is through no choice of his own that the writer thus makes use of one and the same word to express different meanings; but it should be noted, for his justification, that in no other field of intellectual speculation so much as in this, is man made to feel the galling inadequateness of language as an instrument for the expression of truth.

A prospective pilot of a flying machine has first of all to take his machine to pieces and put it together again. It appears that when he has succeeded in this, more than half the technical part of his task of learning how to fly is accomplished: the rest is only a matter of daring and experiment. He may trust himself to fly who has the will and a good machine, and knows its working; who, moreover, is wide awake to all contingencies that he is liable to encounter when once he has climbed into the sky.

It is very much the same with the Christian who is desirous to take his flight into the lofty realm of Divine Contemplation. Let him but have the will and a thorough knowledge of the workings of Divine Grace in his soul, and let him act with all his faculties on the alert, and he will succeed.

No set of rules will ever supersede actual practice and personal experience. This is the reason why I have directed all my energies to spreading out before my reader's eyes the intricacies of the genuine notion of Divine Contemplation. When he has mastered this exposition, he can fly.

A priori rules have a tendency to make a man too self-conscious, and thereby take away his freedom of action. A reminiscence of my early childhood may serve to illustrate the point. When I was seven or eight years of age in "la douce France," my native country, it was the custom for our teachers at the end of the year to make us write a letter of good wishes, "un compliment de bonne année," to our dear parents. This proved a laborious task, and more than once

our page was adorned with ink-stains and smudges—not the page only but our fingers, and even our face. This letter was to be read with great solemnity on the morning of New Year's Day, before the whole family assembled, previous to our receiving the New Year's presents.

Looking back upon it now I must say it strikes me that it was a very absurd performance, stiff and unnatural for us little ones. We hardly understood the high-flown language of what we had written ; certainly we did not mean it. But the bright moment for parents and children came, when, tossing away the silly paper, we threw ourselves into the arms lovingly outstretched to us, and kissed, and were kissed, to our heart's content. *Ah! that was the real thing!* Then came the toys and boxes of sweets, and on our part a fresh outburst of embraces and laughter and babbling talk. This second part of the performance was undoubtedly the greatest success.

The true contemplative is like those little children : he brings to his intercourse with God a filial spirit of freedom and tenderness, not one of compulsion and formalism. He loves, and knows himself to be loved ; he is incessantly playing the divine game of love. Do the same, dear reader : and may God speed you, till we meet again, if you will, in my next book on "The Loving Contemplation of Our Lord Jesus Christ!"

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